

Our Lady of Lourdes

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time

June 13, 2010

Readings:

2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13

Galatians 2:16, 19-21

Luke 7:36-8:3 or 7:36-50

Deacon Bob

The readings on this Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Times speak to God's mercy and forgiveness in the face of human sinfulness. From the greatest, King David to the least the unnamed sinful woman, Scripture teaches us that God forgives anyone with a repentant and loving heart.

Even the Church can not withhold forgiveness according to our just deserts. It would be a real gamble to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation if there was a chance that our sins might not be forgiven. Father does not have an ejector button that will send us sailing out of the room. Forgiveness is available to those who need it and we all do.

Bishop Sheen would begin his television program with a humorous story. Once Bishop Sheen told the story about a priest who went to hear confessions in a mining community. The first man to come in told the priest how long it had been since his last confession and then he said, "Father I can't think of any sins I have not murdered anyone." The priest told him to get out and make a good examination of conscience. The man went out and told those in line, "It is no good boys; he is hearing only murder cases."

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is certainly available for serious sin but it is available for all who are trying to draw closer to God. But just because something is available doesn't mean we make use of it. Forgiveness is available in the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. A lot of us never step forward to receive this grace. We stay away from the beautiful Sacrament of Reconciliation for many reasons. The grace of the Sacrament is there for us and forgiveness remains ours for the taking. It has been said that those who love best are those who know they are loved and those who forgive best are those who know they are forgiven. If we are willing to receive forgiveness from God then we may be better able to give it away to those who could use it.

Our gospel is a powerful story. It is something that should surprise us. Jesus forgives the sinful woman and criticizes the Pharisee but most of us are not surprised at all. When we hear the word Pharisee we might think "bad guy". The Pharisees were not bad people. They devoted their lives to doing God's will. They studied the scriptures and scrupulously tried to obey God's will in every way.

Let's put Jesus' encounter with the Pharisee in context. Simon the Pharisee held an important place in the community and he didn't invite just anyone to dinner. He invited important people to dinner. He was not sure about Jesus but he wanted to get a closer look. Jesus was being called a great prophet and Simon wanted see if this was true. He found out much more than he thought he wanted to know.

Just imagine having a dinner party at your home with important guests and a woman knocks at the door and weeping approaches one of the men in the party. She washes his feet and wipes them with her hair, she repeatedly kisses his feet and anoints his head.

Simon sees all this taking place and he just can not believe that Jesus not only tolerates the woman but actually welcomes her gestures. Simon says that Jesus could not be a prophet. If he were he would know what kind of woman this was and he would dismiss her. Jesus is the greatest prophet; he sees what is in the heart of the woman and of Simon.

We listen or read this story and we fail to see the surprises. The surprises are important. Recognizing the surprises helps us to being open to changing our lives; it helps us understand what Christ may be asking of us.

Simon was a good person but he could see the good only in good people, people just like him. Simon didn't think he needed God to forgive him but to recognize his achievements. The woman on the other hand knew she was a sinner. She needed forgiveness and she knew Jesus offered her a new start.

Jesus told the woman her sins are forgiven, If he had said this to Simon he might have said what sins? The real difference between Simon and the woman was she desperately sought mercy, Simon didn't realize he needed mercy. We should not imagine ourselves from being immune from this kind of spiritual pride. A possible danger for us looking at this story is for us to think we are not like the Pharisee. Perhaps we are both the sinful woman and the Pharisee at times in our lives.

Jesus asks Simon "Do you see this woman?" Simon does not answer but an honest answer might have been "No." Simon saw the reputation of the woman. He saw her unusual behavior and how she disrupted his dinner party. He sees Jesus' failure to respond as he thought Jesus should respond. He sees many things but he does not see the woman. He does not see her as a human being created in God's image, as one who is trying to change.

In her book, "Out of the Salt Shaker" Rebecca Pippert tells about a college student whose name was Bill. Bill was not a fancy dresser in fact Bill never wore shoes, summer or winter, rain or snow. He was always barefooted.

There was an attractive church across the street from the campus. Bill decided to worship there one Sunday. Dressed in his jeans and T-shirt and barefoot of course Bill stood out like a sore thumb. He walked down the aisle looking for a seat, but all the pews were full. Bill was not bothered by this he simply sat down on the carpet at the front of church. As you can imagine he became the center of attention.

An elderly man got up from his pew and walked down the aisle toward Bill. Everyone was tense, was he going to ask him to leave, would there be a scene. But when the man reached Bill he lowered himself, with much difficulty and took a seat next to Bill on the carpet. That is where they worshipped God that morning. Rebecca says, "I was told there was not a dry eye in the congregation." All are welcome in the kingdom of God.

As we consider all these things today, we may ask ourselves who are we in these stories? Are we Simon the Pharisee, are we the sinful woman, are we Barefoot Bill or are we the old man who sat on the floor.