

11TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, JUNE 11, 2016

1st Reading: 2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13 [The Lord has forgiven your sin]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 32 ["Lord, forgive the wrong I have done"]

2nd Reading: Galatians 2:16, 19-21 [If justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing]

Gospel: Luke 7:36-8:3 [Her great love *proves* that her many sins have been forgiven]

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (Luke 7, 36-8,3)

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to dine with him.

Jesus went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at table.

A woman known in the town to be a sinner had learned that Jesus was at table at that house.

Bringing an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, she waited, weeping, at his feet.

Then she washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, kissing them and anointing them with the oil.

When the Pharisee saw this, he said to himself,

"If this man were a real prophet, he would know who this woman is that touches him. He would know that she is a sinner."

In answer to his thoughts, Jesus spoke: "Simon, I have something to say to you."

"Tell me, teacher," Simon replied. "Two people were in debt to a money lender.

One owed him five hundred day's wages, the other owed fifty.

Since neither was able to repay the debt, he forgave it for both of them.

Now, which of them will love him more?"

Simon replied, "I should think the one who was forgiven more."

"You are right," said Jesus.

Then, turning to the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?"

When I entered your house, you provided no water for my feet, but this woman has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.

You gave me no kiss of greeting, but she has been kissing my feet ever since I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfumed oil.

And so, I tell you, **her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven.***
(TEV, 1992)*

Where little has been forgiven, little love is shown.

Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests began to ask themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."

Afterward he journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary of Magdala, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

The Gospel of the Lord

♪ Troubled souls, why will you scatter/ Like a crowd of frightened sheep?
Foolish hearts, why will you wander/ From a love so true and deep?
There is welcome for the sinner/ And more graces for the good;
There is mercy with the Savior,/There is healing in his blood. ♪

Can you name that hymn? The title is "*There's a wideness in God's Mercy.*" And it is an old hymn: [Lyrics by Frederick Faber c 1840; Tune – c 1710]

All four Readings, the one from 2 Samuel, the Responsorial Psalm [which is a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures that we usually sing] the reading from Paul's letter, and the Gospel story, as well as the scripture verse at the Alleluia ["God loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins"]; all the readings today tell us that *There is a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea.* They reveal the Mercy of God as all embracing, like the air we breathe & the water that makes up most of our bodies, like the ground we stand on and the love that nurtures us.

Pope Francis writes about this mercy in exuberant words in the exhortation that began the Jubilee Year of Mercy:

The mystery of mercy is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. *Mercy*: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity.

Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us.

Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of their brothers and sisters on the path of life.

Mercy: the bridge that connects God and us, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

All of the characters in the readings today are touched by mercy in different ways. The Scripture is meant to be a mirror in which we can see parts of ourselves;

Which characters do you see yourself in?

David? Whose sins are exposed by the prophet, Nathan? Whom God forgives, but without excusing his sins? The king who sings in the Responsorial Psalm, "I confess my faults to the Lord."

Bathsheba? Who slept with the king, lost her first child, but is also forgiven & later became the mother of Solomon, one of the ancestors of Jesus.

Paul? Who was transformed by the mercy of God from a persecutor to an apostle. Who writes so powerfully of the gift of mercy, the gift of salvation in the 2nd reading.

The woman who knelt at the feet of Jesus? Who comes in fully aware of her sins, but leaves even more deeply aware that she is forgiven.

Simon the Pharisee? Who sits in judgment on the woman and Jesus, and never seems to become aware of his sins against hospitality & of his own blindness to who Jesus is.

Mary of Magdala? Who is well off, like Simon, but uses her wealth to support the ministry of Jesus; who is delivered from 7 demons, and is the 1st witness to the Resurrection of Jesus; who is later mistakenly merged with the sinful woman who anoints his feet.

The stories of each of these characters point to the truth that mercy is like the air we breathe, or the water we need to live.

You are probably wondering why I put a glass of water on the altar before the Mass today. It is because as an image of the mystery of mercy.

It is a gift - something that is there before we have done anything to earn it or deserve it. In the 1st reading, Nathan the prophet says to David, "*The Lord **has** forgiven your sin.*" And Jesus, in the Gospel, says to the woman, "*Your sins **are** forgiven.*"

I remember being surprised when I heard Brother David Steindl-Rast, a man of deep prayer and knowledge of the Scriptures, say at a conference, "*In the Gospels, Jesus never says 'I forgive your sins.' He always says, 'your sins **are** forgiven.'*" In other words, the mercy of God is already offered - as a **gift**. Our part is to breathe it in, or drink it down.

As one of my Friar friends used to say:

"We know the value of a glass of water, but do we know the value of thirst?"

The gift of mercy, of forgiveness draws the love out of the woman - & out of us, not the other way around. We don't save ourselves by what we do, by what Paul calls the law - even by keeping the law of love that sums up the call of Jesus.

That is clear from the little parable in the Gospel about the 2 debtors. In that story, the one with the greater debt was like the woman, and the one who owed only 50 days wages - a 10th of the first - is like Simon, who is not aware of his sins of judgment & against hospitality.

It is also clear in the readings from the Hebrew Scriptures and from Paul's letter that forgiveness is a gift that precedes our grateful love. That is why I used a translation that quotes Jesus as saying, "*Her great love **proves** that her many sins have been forgiven.*"

The translation in the Lectionary [*"her many sins have been forgiven **because** she has shown great love."*] is mistaken and too literal. It is a mistake that has been made by some ancient preachers and some older translations, perhaps because it's very difficult even today to admit that we can't **earn** mercy or salvation, even by loving.

Finally, the readings and the characters in them teach us that, in spite of the fact that mercy is a free gift, we still have work to do - hard work! Our work, like that of David, Paul the sinful woman, & Mary Magdalene, is to drink the water of God's mercy, to breathe the air of Christ's love.

That may seem easy, but it is really not, because it includes facing the facts of our sins and remembering that God forgives, and does not excuse the wrong that we do - or the good that we fail to do. All but Simon in the readings today did that work.

Pope Francis speaks of mercy in the light of **God's** justice:

God's justice **is** his mercy. It becomes the liberating force for those oppressed by slavery to sin and its consequences. Mercy is not opposed to justice but rather expresses **God's** way of reaching out to sinners, offering them a new chance to look at themselves, be converted, and believe.

There is a line in the 1st verse of the hymn I began with that says something very similar:

"There's a kindness in his justice/ Which is more than liberty."

As we move from hearing and reflecting on the Word of God to praying the Eucharistic Prayer and receiving Communion, we are all invited to taste the mercy of God poured out by Christ - and to receive the healing forgiveness that doesn't excuse our sins,
but transforms our deepest selves.

♪ *There's a wideness in God's mercy/ Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice/ Which is more than liberty.
There is plentiful redemption/ In the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members/ In the sorrows of the Head.* ♪

