

11th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "C"
June 11-12, 2016

Hoarding the love of God.

Readings: 2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13; Galatians 2:16,19-21; Luke 7:36- 8:3

The word 'Pharisee' means 'separated one'. In Jesus' time 6,000 of them were spread across Palestine. They taught in synagogues and saw themselves as religious models. They became the self-appointed guardians of the law and its observance. We would be wise to refrain from painting a picture of Pharisees as horrible people. They were sincere in their desire to keep the commandments scrupulously, but too often missed the larger picture.

As we learned in today's Gospel, since this particular Pharisee invited Jesus over for dinner, he did not desire to be completely separate. But soon enough, the dinner party had become quite uncomfortable. Perhaps we can relate at some point in our lives! But if it was uncomfortable, it was in order for Jesus to illustrate how we must guard against our faith becoming too turned in upon itself, such that we lose sight of the bigger picture.

It is certainly not a stretch to conclude that the Pharisee was upset when an uninvited guest showed up at the dinner. A woman had heard that Jesus was going to be present and she arrived with an alabaster flask of ointment. I'll be honest- I'd be a little upset, wouldn't you? She then proceeds to anoint his feet with the oil, causing grave scandal to the Pharisee. He felt completely tainted by her presence, holding fast that to dine with sinners was forbidden.

But could there also be something else? It seems clear that the Pharisee thought that Jesus was a prophet, and as a result he wanted to dine with him. But did he also wish to possess Jesus, to have him all to himself? Was this woman "stealing his thunder," was she getting in the way of his private moment? Perhaps all these played into the narrative. Perhaps we secretly desire to contain God in order to "hoard" his love, keeping it all for ourselves.

Jesus tries to explain that because of her great love, her sins were forgiven. The passage literally reads, “her many sins have been forgiven, seeing that she has loved much.” That the woman’s sins have been forgiven is attested by the great love she shows toward Jesus.¹ “But the one to whom little is given, loves little.”

The Pharisee’s self-righteousness leads to little forgiveness by God and consequently little love shown toward Jesus. The sinful woman, on the other hand, manifests a faith in God that has led her to seek forgiveness for her sins, and because so much was forgiven, she now overwhelms Jesus with her display of love.² She loved so much.

Our Catechism teaches us that “Contemplative prayer is the prayer of the child of God, of the forgiven sinner who agrees to welcome the love by which he is loved and who wants to respond to it by loving even more.”³ Her presence, totally unexpected as an uninvited guest, was the result of an overflowing heart of love, gratitude that could not be contained.

So yes- she crashed the party- but her intentions were solely directed as an act of extravagant gratitude and in no way meant as disrespect to the Pharisee. Do we love “little,” do we in fact withhold our love towards those whom we disapprove?

In a homily given during a parish visit in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI noted that the response of the woman in this passage “highlighted that only divine forgiveness and divine love received with an open and sincere heart give us the strength to resist evil and “to sin no more”, to let ourselves be struck by God's love so that it becomes our strength.” Truly, the woman was struck by God’s love; it

¹ cf. online footnote to the New American Bible, (Luke 7:36-50)

² Ibid.

³ cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 2712

captivated her and enveloped her.⁴ Truly, the woman was struck by God's love; it captivated her and enveloped her.

Conversely, the Pharisee was trying to contain God's love in categories he could control, by means of rules he could manipulate. For us too, sinners that we are, it is all too easy to squander our love, to use it in the wrong way. And like the Pharisee, we do not easily understand *the power of love to transform*. Only in the Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ do we come to see that love is the measure of all things in the Kingdom of God, because "God is love" (1Jo. 4, 8). We can fully experience love in this life *only through faith and repentance*.

Our first reading reminds us that anointing was used in the Old Testament to set one apart for a specific purpose. It was a deliberate sign of consecration, such that the individual was in some way changed. David admits quite candidly to the heavenly Father, "I have sinned against the Lord."

A man of King David's position in life did not need to admit failure or error. He could easily have gotten away with what he did and allowed his sins to remain shrouded in mystery. The grace of God truly changed David and he walked humbly with God. Both he and the woman in today's Gospel point to the transformative power of God's love and grace. We would be wise to heed their example.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, visit to St. Felicity and her children, Martyrs parish, Rome, 25 March 2007. See also, Pope John Paul II: *Homily during his Pastoral visit to the United States in 1987, at the Pontiac Silverdome near Detroit*:

We do well to reflect upon the love in the heart of this woman, who washed the Lord's feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. We can imagine the bitter sorrow that led her to such an extravagant gesture. Yet *by giving herself humbly to God*, she discovered the far greater and underserved gift of which we have spoken, namely, *God's gift of himself to her*. Through this exchange of gifts, the woman found herself once again, only now she was healed and restored. "Your sins are forgiven," Jesus says to her, "... go in peace" (*Ibid.* 7, 48).