

This Sunday's Readings – the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time – The theme of all of today's readings is the forgiveness of sin.

Today's first reading is taken from the second Book of Samuel. The two Books of Samuel were written sometime in the late 7th century BC and recount the history of Israel from the end of the age of the Judges to the end of the reign of King David. Even though David is considered the greatest of the Israelite kings, his personal life leaves a lot to be desired. He is definitely not a saint. In today's reading, David had taken another man's wife, Bathsheba, and had relations with her, had gotten her pregnant, and to cover up the illicit affair had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, who was a loyal mercenary fighting for David, killed in battle against the Ammonites. He then took Bathsheba as his wife. David thought that he had succeeded in covering up the whole affair but nothing can be hidden from the Lord. The Lord sends Nathan the prophet to confront and indict David for the sins that he has committed. David confesses that he has transgressed the Lord and says to Nathan – "I have sinned against the Lord". Expecting the worst, Nathan tells David – "The Lord on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die". The crimes of adultery and murder were punishable by death, but the Lord, loving and compassionate, forgave David. However, David was punished for his sins (see 2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:25) but not by death. Reginald H. Fuller in his *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* adds this comment – "This is the classic Old Testament statement of the pattern of self-examination in the light of God's law, followed by confession of the sin as an offense against God and not merely against another person (see Ps 51:4: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned"), and concluding with the confessor's declaration that God *has* put away the sin".

Since we are now back in Ordinary Time, the Gospel readings continue with Luke. There are two parts to this reading. In the first part, Jesus is invited to dine with Simon, a Pharisee. When Jesus arrives, a "sinful woman" from the town came and bathed His feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, kissed His feet, and anointed His feet with oil. When Simon questions Jesus as to why He would let "a sinner" even touch Him, Jesus replies that because of her great love, her many sins were forgiven. Fr. Roger Karban in his 2007 syndicated column adds this comment – "No matter the "sins" of the woman in today's gospel pericope, Jesus demands that Simon, her critic, also acknowledge the good in her act of anointing." Her many sins have been forgiven because she has shown great love The one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." In the second part we read about the women who accompanied Jesus and the Twelve during Jesus' ministry. Only Luke mentions these women. Fr. Roger Karban in his 2007 syndicated column further comments about this – "Luke's Jesus is just one chapter away from beginning his momentous eleven chapter journey to Jerusalem when the evangelist tells readers about Jesus' traveling companions." Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities . . . who provided for them out of their resources." From that point in Luke's gospel, whenever he refers to Jesus' disciples we're to presume they're both male and female, a fact many through the centuries have conveniently overlooked. No one should be surprised at Jesus' openness to women. He experienced God present, working in all people. Perhaps that's why Paul, one chapter after today's Galatians pericope, reminds his readers that they're to imitate the risen Jesus'

distinctive trait of breaking through racial, social and gender limits. Those who can't pull that off are not only guilty of professing a non-biblical faith, they're also guilty of putting limits on God”.

Unless we understand the cultural aspects of today's readings, we cannot understand their true message. John J. Pilch in his *The Cultural World of Jesus, Sunday by Sunday, Cycle C* explains the cultural aspect of these readings – “Though similar to stories reported in Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8, Luke's report appears to be an independent tradition. Sensitivity to the cultural world in which this story originated makes it possible to highlight a few of Luke's special interests.

DEBT

The central point of this story—forgiveness of sin—hinges on first-century Mediterranean peasant understanding of debt. Scholars estimate that excessive claims upon meager peasant resources (tithes, taxes, tribute, numerous tolls) consumed between 35 and 40 percent of total agricultural production. The path to enormous indebtedness required but a few small steps. Peasants who were unable to repay their loans lost their land and became tenant sharecroppers. When this, too, failed, they were driven from their ancestral land. Since the scriptural evidence indicates that Jesus was known by all to be from Nazareth yet his ancestral ties extended back to Bethlehem, scholars suggest that at some point in history his ancestors experienced precisely this kind of fate. Such dispossessed people who lost their land frequently became artisans like Joseph and Jesus. It is this experience of material indebtedness and both the hope and possibility of its forgiveness as in Jesus' parable (and the Lord's Prayer) that helped a peasant to understand the forgiveness of sin. Jesus' question to Simon the Pharisee was easy to answer: a person forgiven a large debt would exhibit greater gratitude than someone forgiven a smaller debt. Our ancestors typically judged each other by external features and actions (1 Sam 16:7). Anyone who witnessed the woman's uninhibited display of love and gratitude could conclude from her actions that she had already experienced forgiveness of sin. “Her many sins have surely been forgiven by God since she has shown such love.”

THE WOMAN AND THE PHARISEE

Luke also paints a deliberate contrast between the Pharisee and the woman. By inviting Jesus to a meal, the Pharisee recognizes Jesus as an equal. In the Mediterranean world, only equals can invite each other to meals. But after Jesus' arrival, the Pharisee extends no other sign of hospitality, suggesting that he does not accept Jesus for who he is: God's prophet. The woman stands in stark contrast. The story tells us she was a sinner but gives not a clue regarding the nature of her sin. Though her sinful reputation was known in the city, we do not know what city it was. That she boldly enters the men's space (reclining at table) and is not impeded by Simon suggests she might be a widow, but Simon's neglect may also be part of his determination to withhold signs of hospitality and respect for Jesus. The woman, however, performs for Jesus all the signs of hospitality that the Pharisee quite intentionally omitted: she provides water for cleansing (v. 44), tenders a

kiss of greeting (v. 45), and provides perfumed oil for anointing (v. 46). It is precisely these deeds that tell us the woman has been forgiven. Simon's refusal to act like a host indicates that he has not experienced—perhaps not even sought—forgiveness. Contemporary Western commitments to equality as a cultural value often make it difficult to perceive other cultures respectfully on their own terms. In today's story, *what* the woman has done for Jesus is much more important than her alleged reputation or status”.

Joe Juellich, Liturgy Team