

11th Sunday of Ordinary time C/2007

Modern Psychology has revealed that, when people who have committed big crimes try by all means to hide them, they often end up with a burden of guilt on their conscience that will eventually make them ill. For that, psychology tries to help people to overcome the guilt and to establish a balance in their lives. But, what it cannot offer is the forgiveness of sin that only God alone can grant.

Today's readings are inviting us to meditate on the fact that the church is not made up with the upright, but with sinners who have been forgiven and who can always count on God's forgiveness and that of their fellows in order to keep going with life.

In the first reading, the prophet Nathan rebukes King David for having sinned grievously in spite of all the blessings he has received from the Lord. In fact, driven by lust, David has just committed adultery with the wife of one of his army officials who was on duty. When the wife became pregnant, David called the husband back in the hope that a short stay with his wife would cover up the affair. As things did not work, he ordered to put him in a fiery position in battle so that he might be killed. Hence, this intervention of Nathan announcing God's punishment, but also his forgiveness following David's repentance.

The story of David reminds us how human lust can blind us, and push us into terrible sins. In spite of all the blessings of the Lord toward us, we are so short of memory that we often do what is contrary to his will. However, God does not abandon us. His deep desire is that we renounce sin, convert and repent. When we do so, he forgives us and restores us in his friendship.

That is the message Jesus conveys in today's Gospel as he is criticized for letting a prostitute approach and touch him. To better understand this text, we have to remember that the Pharisees put a clear separation between the good and the bad, the holy ones and the sinners. They cut themselves from anyone who was a sinner and unfaithful to the Law of Moses. Their great battle was the respect of the Law in all its details. In that sense, we understand why the host of Jesus was severe toward him as he indifferently welcomed the prostitute woman.

However, it is precisely in his scrupulous need to appear just that Simon forgets what the essence of the law is. First of all, it was a custom in Israel that when a guest entered a house he might be greeted with a kiss of peace, which was a mark of respect. Then, cool water was poured over his feet to remove the dust from the streets and, finally, sweet-smelling incense was burnt or a drop of rose oil was placed on the guest's head.

In spite of his pretension to respect the law, none of these demands were fulfilled by the host of Jesus. On the contrary, the prostitute woman has provided for all these omissions. She has done it, not in order to obtain some favor from Jesus, but as a sign of love that begs forgiveness for her many sins, as the manifestation of her resolve to change and become another person. There is no doubt that this woman has once heard Jesus preach, standing at the edge of the crowd, and was touched by his message. How could she miss the opportunity of

meeting him now that he is in a house nearby! That is why she does not care about her status and what people think about her. She has only one aim, namely to see Jesus, and have the chance to start a new life, forgiven and renewed, with peace of heart. What she wanted, she obtained from Jesus. Then Jesus can say, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace”.

When Jesus asks Simon, “Do you see this woman?” I think that Simon sees only a whore. But, is that all she is? Is not there more good in a person than the bad he/she can do? It is not because something is true that it is the whole truth. We can use the truth about people to ridicule them or to destroy them. When we use a truth about people to make them seem cheap, we hide a large truth that makes them worthy. When we lock up a person in his/her past situation, we deny him/her the possibility of change and transformation she needs to live a full life.

This story contains two contrasting attitudes of mind and heart. Like Simon, there are people who think that they are good people and, therefore, feel no love and, consequently, receive no forgiveness. Forgiveness springs out of a need to be forgiven and the recognition of one’s sins. Like the prostitute woman, people who are determined to abandon their past life receive God’s forgiveness, because God is love. After all, the one thing which keeps us far from God is self-sufficiency. If the greatest ignorance is not knowing that we ignore, the greatest of sins is to be conscious of no sin.

I presume that after having been forgiven, the prostitute woman joined the group of women who were supportive of Jesus and served him out of their resources. While she went in peace, Simon remained the same, in his scrupulous observance of the law, incapable of love. The truth, however, is that we are not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. We may tend to appear “perfect” by our rigorous observance of norms and religious rules, but it does not make us able to love. Love is bound up with forgiveness, and forgiveness with faith.

By accepting the invitation to dine at the house of Simon, Jesus uses this social occasion to bring peace and forgiveness to those who are in need. By telling the story of two debtors, he challenges us with the question of how we see other people. Do we confine people in their wrongdoings or do we encourage them to trust God’s mercy, to change and receive his forgiveness? Let us remember that forgiveness promotes change in people; it allows them to build a new future. Our future we enjoy today would be impossible if we were not encouraged by our fathers who gave us life, and whose feast we celebrate. May God bless them all for all the sacrifices they have accepted to bring us up and make us what we are today. May God bless, in particular, young fathers who have the big challenge of this family life and work before them. God bless you all.



Homily Date: June 17, 2007
© 2007 – Father Felicien Ilunga Mbala
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20070617homily.pdf

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