

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2016

The readings of this Sunday talk about forgiveness. They show that God forgives human beings anytime they turn away from their sinful past and look forward in building a new life with him. They invite us also to forgive each other as God does for us.

The first reading describes the affair of King David with the wife of one of his officers. It shows that David had received many blessings from God in terms of election, security and reward.

It also shows that, in spite of those blessings, David did sin by appropriating the wife of his officer, Uriah, and by having him killed. Finally, the text shows the work of the prophet Nathan toward David as well as David's deep regret over his sins.

What is behind this text is the idea that human beings forget easily God's blessings upon them and are envious of others. There is also the idea that human lust makes people blind and capable of committing crimes. Another idea is the truth that in spite of human sin, God does not reject anyone who asks of him forgiveness and wants to repent of his sins.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus speaks of forgiveness in the parable of the two debtors. In fact, the Gospel starts with the mention of the invite given to Jesus to dine in the house of one of the leading Pharisees.

Then, it speaks of a notorious sinful woman of the city who came in, washed Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair and anointed them with a perfume. After that, it talks about the scandalous reaction from the host Pharisee who criticized Jesus for his tenure. Then, it gives Jesus' reaction to the critique under the parable of the two debtors.

Finally, the Gospel shows the host's confusion over his answer to Jesus' question. The Gospel ends mentioning Jesus' teaching from one village to another accompanied by some benefactor women.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about God's forgiveness. In order to help us understand the importance of this theme, we need to get at the heart of the Gospel and discover the lessons it contains.

In fact, Jesus is criticized by his host for letting himself be touched by a woman who is known in the village to be a public sinner. Apparently, this critique seems to be legitimate, but in truth it is not. Why? As a matter of fact, from the point of view of tradition, it was said that any sinner has to be avoided lest the one welcoming him becomes impure. It is from this consideration that the Pharisee critiques Jesus because he is not respectful of the Law.

However, such a critique presupposes also that the Pharisee himself was respectful of the Law. And yet, according to the facts revealed by Jesus in the Gospel, he did not. For instance, it was a custom that when a guest entered a house, he might be greeted with a kiss of peace. Then, water was poured over his feet in order to remove the dust from the streets. It was also a custom to burn the incense or to pour a drop of oil on the head of the guest, etc (Ecclesiastes 9: 8; Amos 8:6; Psalm 23: 5).

As it appears, Simon did not respect any of those marks of courtesy destined to honor the guest. If that is true, then, his pretention to respect the Law was just external and insincere. In truth, his attitude was a self-justification because, according to his own judgment, he pretended to be holy. And this is the drama of this Gospel. I believe that such a drama continues to happen even today in our midst.

Unlike Simon, the woman was without pretention. She recognized her true state before Jesus and of which she was not proud. Her deep desire was to be forgiven of her many sins and her intention was to change her life. That is why she approached him. Her tears were an expression of the regret of her sins and her will to do better in the future. As she wanted to be forgiven, Jesus gave her the forgiveness of sin and the peace of heart she never had before.

In fact, this parable invites us to be sensitive to the plague of all our brothers and sisters we judge as public sinners. In truth, who of us has never sinned? If there is none, then, we have all to repent, to put ourselves in the shoes of those people and to be compassionate. Moreover, if God who knows the truth in the heart of each one of his children forgives their many sins, why are we jealous and critical of them?

This Gospel teaches us also one more thing about God: he is merciful. That is why he forgives us our sins so that we change and inherit his kingdom. That is the reason why Jesus welcomed that woman, though he knew he would be criticized. By doing so, Jesus does not justify the sins of people as though it does not matter to wander far from God. What he wants to show us, rather, is that God continually gives us opportunities to renounce our past and to turn to him.

In that perspective, by welcoming this prostitute, Jesus wants to show how salvation is so important that when someone decides to change his life, God forgives him. That is why, when we lock people in their past situation, we deny them the possibility of change and the reception of eternal life.

One of the consequences to draw from such a vision is that each one of us is important before God in spite of our sins. Even those condemned by society because of their crimes are still worthy before God. What God wants is that they change their life and receive salvation. It means also that no one has the right to depreciate himself because of his sinful past, because once God forgives us, he gives the opportunity to build a new future with him.

Let us, then, take advantage of God's mercy in the sacrament of confession and return to him. Like David, let us sincerely ask God's forgiveness for our sins. May he give us the courage to change our life! May the celebration of the Holy Year of Mercy bring us to conversion of heart! May God bless you all!

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



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