



Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time June 13, 2010 C

WHEN OUR SIN MEETS GOD'S MERCY

The theme running through all three readings today is the awesome mercy of God.

In the first reading, the prophet Nathan confronts King David about his sins but he doesn't stop there. He also assures him of God's mercy. David's sins were pretty huge: adultery and murder to cover up his sin—sex and violence. Wouldn't today's media love to cover this sensational story! Some comments on the story:

- Even though David has committed pretty serious sins, it seems he has no sense of his wrongdoing until the prophet Nathan helps him to see the bad things that he has done. Like David, we too could suffer from blindness to sin in our lives. We may be caught up in some pattern of wrongdoing but be totally blind to the sinfulness of our actions, or we may rationalize our behavior as okay because “everyone else is doing it.”

- *The grace of awareness of sin.* In the famous parable of the prodigal son, there is a moment when the prodigal son “comes to his senses” and becomes aware that he has sinned grievously against his father. Peter has a similar moment of awareness when Jesus confronts him in the courtyard during his trial. Jesus' look of love leads Peter to “weep bitterly.” Some saints used to pray for the gift of tears for their sins. For David, the grace of awareness only comes when Nathan tells him the following parable:

The Lord sent Nathan to David, and when he came to him, he said: “Judge this case for me! In a certain town there were two men, one rich, the other poor. The rich man had flocks and herds in great numbers. But the poor man had nothing at all except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He nourished her, and she grew up with him and his children. She shared the little food he had and drank from his cup and slept in his bosom. She was like a daughter to him. Now, the rich man received a visitor, but he would not take from his own flocks and herds to prepare a meal for the wayfarer who had come to him. Instead he took the poor man's ewe lamb and made a meal of it for his visitor.” David grew very angry with that man and said to Nathan: “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this merits death! He shall restore the ewe lamb fourfold because he has done this and has had no pity.” (2 Sam 12:1-6)

David is appalled at the rich man's greed and declares that he deserves to die. Then Nathan, having touched the king's sense of fairness, speaks truth to power: “*You are that man.*” The scales of blindness fall from David's eyes and he realizes what he has done. Like Peter, David is deeply sorry for his sins. His deep sense of repentance wins him God's mercy.

- *Nathan ministers God's mercy to David.* When David professes in today's reading: “*I have sinned against the Lord,*” Nathan tells him: “*The Lord on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die.*” Sometimes we may imagine our sins are too heavy for God to forgive. I certainly have met many people who think this. Perhaps all of us may have felt this way at one time or another. The great and wonderful Good News that Jesus came to bring is that no sin of ours is too big for God to forgive. God's mercy is always bigger than our sin. Our challenge is to believe this Good News not only in our heads but also in our hearts.

- *David's Act of Contrition.* Psalm 51 is considered to be David's act of sorrow after God opens his eyes to his sins. Here are some of the lines from this most beautiful psalm:

*Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness;
in your abundant compassion blot out my
offense.*

*Wash away all my guilt;
from all my sins cleanse me.*

*Since you insist on sincerity of heart,
in my inmost being teach me wisdom.*

*A clean heart create for me, O God;
renew in me a steadfast spirit.*

- This story calls us not to point the finger at the sins of another but to look inward at our own sins. Reflecting on today's first reading, Patricia Sanchez writes: *As we reflect today on David's sin against God, against Uriah and against Bathsheba, and on the manner in which Nathan led his king to an acknowledgement of his guilt, this narrative invites all who hear it to look inward. Rather than focus on the sin of another, however great, Nathan's startling revelation, “You are the man!”...“You are the woman!” compels our attention. Just as that statement marked a decisive moment in*

David's life, so also can it radically affect our own. What we do next is up to us.

Jesus' Encounter with the Sinful Woman in Simon's House

This Gospel is a powerful expression of the unconditional love that God has for the sinner. It includes an action and a parable with the latter explaining the former. Jesus forgives the woman's sins by accepting her act of hospitality, even before he pronounces the words of forgiveness. And as his parable explains, her love, in turn, is great because she has been forgiven much. Commenting on this Gospel, John Schmitz writes:

The Pharisee represents those community members who stingily dispense forgiveness and carefully select those worthy of it. Most likely they excluded their own kind from even needing forgiveness.

The penitent woman represents those community members who openly admit their need of God's forgiveness by their attitudes and actions. Such behavior Jesus encourages and praises.

The sandwiched parable of the generous money-lender suggests that God forgives all types of people—sinners great and small. Those sinners most receptive to God's love are abundantly blessed, while those perfect Pharisee-types receive little forgiveness because of their blindness.

The women named at the end of today's reading become very important. They represent those who had received the healing touch of Jesus. A true ministry of forgiveness and healing can take place only in a community where the members receive this healing themselves before they try to extend it to others. Luke seems to indicate that these women performed this ministry quite effectively.

More reflections on the Gospel. Patrick McCormick writes:

Unraveling the web of his parable, Jesus suggests that Simon is scandalized by any kindness to the woman because he believes in a God who loves little. Simon is upset with Jesus' compassion for the "unworthy" prostitute because he is convinced that should he sin in such a way, God would shun him completely. Simon is afraid of his God who loves so little and whose wrath is aroused so easily. He is annoyed at mercy shown the woman because he does not believe such mercy would be shown him, and so believing in such a God, Simon too is a person of little love.

Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

One day a friend paid a visit to Michelangelo. He found the great sculptor chipping away at a huge block

of marble. The floor was covered with bits of marble and dust. It was not a pretty scene.

"What in heaven's name are you doing?" the friend asked.

"I'm releasing the angel imprisoned in this marble," Michelangelo replied.

Simon, the Pharisee, looked at the woman and saw a sinner who would always be a sinner. Jesus looked at her and saw a sinner who was capable of becoming a saint.

As a result of her encounter with Jesus, the woman began to live a new and better life. And she would travel further down the road than any of those who were now judging her. By welcoming her as he did, and graciously accepting her gift, Jesus put wind in her sails.

Jesus says in today's Gospel: "Her many sins are forgiven her because she has shown great love." In contrast, Simon, the dutiful religious man, showed very little love. At the end of the day, the nameless prostitute received an A+ from Jesus, and Simon, the religious leader, probably received a C-. We who come to church all the time, say our prayers and try to be good, must be constantly aware that we are not looking down our noses on all those non-churchgoers and sinners out there. Only Jesus who can look into our hearts and see our motives and into the hearts of non-religious people can judge who is closest to God.

A father and son book. Ben Bradlee, former executive of the Washington Post, and his son, Quinn, who is learning disabled, have written a book called *A Life's Work: Fathers and Sons*. In the prologue to the book, the authors write: "This book is about fathers and sons and how they forge relationships. It isn't just about the two of us. It is about all fathers and sons. It isn't just about a particular time in our lives. It's about a whole life span—a father watching his son grow, learn, and flourish, a son reaping the benefit of his father's experience, wisdom, and values. It's about a special bond between two guys. For us it was in the woods, both with each of our fathers. There are two things that matter—time spent together and love. You cannot have a real father-son relationship without being together. Nor can you have one without love. Sometimes it takes work. Not just during the early years, or the teenage years, or the midlife years. It takes a lifetime. That's why we decided to call this book, *A Life's Work*."

Have a blessed week,

