

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - C

2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13; Psalm 32; Galatians 2:16, 19-21; Luke 7:36-8:3.

Every one of us has or will find ourselves in the same place as the woman in today's Gospel – sinners in need of healing and forgiveness. Every one of us has or will find ourselves from time to time in the difficult place of needing to offer forgiveness to another when we struggle with the inclination toward revenge or retaliation instead.

Our even limited experience tells us how difficult forgiveness can be at times. The refusal to forgive those who offend has ended friendships, destroyed marriages, split families and in the lives of some (far too many that we read about or hear of in the news) has lead to violence.

It is therefore not just a nicety to hear today's Gospel it is rather imperative that we not only hear it but take it to heart.

The woman comes to Jesus seeking mercy and inner peace; she is open and receptive because she knows her need for forgiveness, her deep faith brings her to Jesus. “Your sins are forgiven; your faith has been your salvation” what powerful and comforting words from Christ. And in the face of the skepticism of Simon the Pharisee Jesus adds: “that is why her many sins are forgiven, because of her great love.” The statement of Jesus may seem ambiguous to us and we might hold to the false notion that it was the woman's love that precipitated God's forgiveness. Rather it should be understood that her ability to love and to love greatly was her response to having been forgiven. The New English Bible averts this ambiguity by translating verse 47, “I tell you, her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven; where little has been forgiven, little love is shown.”

Today's Scriptures invite us to see that holiness does not consist in never having sinned but in the ability to recognize our failures, to accept our human limitations, to embrace that we are indeed sinners and stand always in need of reconciliation. The joy of being forgiven expands our heart's capacity for loving.

From personal experience I can attest to a powerful, tangible feeling of being accepted by God (despite my human limitations and sinfulness) every time I hear the words of absolution announced by my regular confessor when celebrating the great Sacrament of Reconciliation. And the response is always to seek ways to expand my ability to love God more by striving to root out what gets in the way of that and by seeking to grow in love of those God places in my life.

Forgiveness is the focus of today's Scriptures – our need to seek forgiveness for ourselves and our call to give forgiveness to others. From the purely human perspective forgiveness is neither easy nor always reasonable. But if we come to know forgiveness to be possible in our small world of family, friends, community, work, school, and neighborhood, then we can see its possibility on a larger scale.

This Gospel is demanding, it asks something difficult of us but not impossible. Our faith as followers of Christ challenges us to show that forgiveness is possible – something we certainly need to strive to achieve, in cases where we have been greatly hurt the need to work at it is all the greater. But to hold onto anger, resentment, mistrust, and the desire for revenge or retaliation – while a normal step to encounter and work through –will prove only to hurt us the more, isolate us and prevent us from knowing the depth of our capacity to love. We need to work at letting go of cynicism and hardness of heart because they only perpetuate revenge and prevent reconciliation.

Let us pray today instead to be graced with the openness, trust and faith that the woman in the Gospel knew; that we too may come to know how great is the love in us, born of our being forgiven and our willingness to forgive in turn.