

HOMILY – SUNDAY ELEVEN – YEAR C

“Extravagant Gestures”

(2 Samuel 12:7-10; 13; Psalm 32; Gal 2:16, 19-21; Luke 7:36-8:3)

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“Love is never having to say you are sorry.” True or false? What do you think of this line from the movie *Love Story*?

Genuine love flows from the experience forgiveness.

That line from the movie about love became fairly popular for a while after the movie came out. That is unfortunate because the reality is just the opposite: real love is *being able to say I am sorry*. Genuine love is the humility to apologize, to receive forgiveness from another, and hopefully to be reconciled with that other. That is love.

The sin of David in the first reading gives us an insight into the nature of love as forgiveness. David’s sin is great because he had been given so much by God. His sin is not out of an evil or obstinate heart, but simply love that has gone astray. Up to this point he has desperately tried to hide his sin of lust, adultery and even murder and pretend that everything is okay. But when the prophet Nathan reveals his sin to him, he breaks down under the accusation, confesses his guilt, says he is sorry, and is able to receive the forgiveness offered to him by God through the prophet.

That is what we see happening, and not happening, in the gospel. The interplay between Simon, Jesus and the woman who is not even named is fascinating, profound and potentially life-changing for those who get it.

Simon, the Pharisee who thinks he is holy and righteous, judges both the woman as a sinner, and Jesus as not a prophet because of his response to her. The little story Jesus tells him, and his response to the woman, reveals Simon as the greater sinner – he is full of false pride; judgmental; hypocritical, and also lacking in hospitality. In his gentle way, Jesus is offering Simon an equal opportunity to repent, to change, to see his own sin for what it is, and come to believe in Jesus and receive the same love and forgiveness the woman received.

The reaction at the table of the others like Simon, however, as they intellectually wonder about the identity of Jesus and continue to try to judge him as a sinner and blasphemer (“Who can forgive sins but God?”) suggests that they and Simon stay stuck in their sin. They are the ones to be pitied, for they will never enter into the kingdom of heaven.

It is just the opposite for the woman. She has already met Jesus (perhaps she is the woman who was caught in adultery). She has already experienced his compassion, understanding and forgiveness, and is now responding to it. As John Shea puts it in his commentary on this passage,

what Jesus is doing is not so much forgiving her sin, as the others at the table discuss, but rather confirming that the woman's love witnesses to the fact of forgiveness. This places the emphasis not on divine forgiveness but on the human openness and courage to respond to it. It is the woman's faith that saved her just as it is the Pharisees' lack of faith, their inability to engage the teachings of Jesus that keeps them from love. The woman goes in peace because peace is the restoration of relationships, and that is precisely what has happened. Is Jesus a friend of tax collectors and sinners? Yes, but even more so, Jesus is a friend of God, and everyone who opens to him is restored to God.

Corbin Eddy, in his commentary, adds another insight. It is with loving tears that both David and the woman in the gospel move on. It is clear that forgiveness is not a reward for their tears. Their tears are a sign of their experience of forgiveness and their loving embrace of that experience. The difference here is that, in the Old Covenant, David has to pay the penalty for his sin (the son born to him will die), whereas in the New Covenant the sin-forgiving Lord takes the penalty for our guilt upon himself. And why is Simon so problematic for Jesus? It is the sin that his tearless face seeks to hide.

Our challenge is to believe in Jesus who IS forgiveness, repent of our sins, receive his forgiveness, forgive ourselves our mistakes in the past, let go of all that guilt, fear, shame, sadness and self-pity, and open ourselves up to receive the overwhelming extravagant love of God who in Jesus takes the penalty of our sins upon himself.

Sometimes we are our own worst enemies when it comes to receiving forgiveness. Mike is a former priest who left the priesthood and subsequently made a lot of foolish mistakes in life, just like the prodigal son. He wasted away the inheritance his father left him, became sexually promiscuous, and thought only of his own pleasure. At one point he declared bankruptcy but did not change his lifestyle. When credit cards were given to him again, he ended up with a \$12,000.00 debt. His partner left him, he is currently unemployed, has been hospitalized for suicidal tendencies, and is desperately hanging on to what seems like a hopeless situation – unable to find employment because of his emotional state, yet needing a job to resolve that state.

He has made some changes, however. Has come back to the church, has confessed his sins, and has made a resolution not to harm himself. His greatest obstacle right now, though, is that he is full of remorse and is stuck in grief and self-pity. He is beating himself up for the mistakes he made in the past, and the consequences of those mistakes that he is experiencing now. His challenge now is to believe in the forgiveness he has received, and to forgive himself, as the woman in the gospel was able to do. In a sense, his refusal to forgive himself is worse than anything else he has ever done. This situation is very real- pray for him that he might be able to complete that journey into the new life of Easter, a step that might even save his life.

The women who were with Jesus, providing for the disciples out of their own resources, are good examples of sinners who met Jesus, experienced his forgiveness and now are able to love others by caring for their needs.

I myself experienced the energy and love that flows from being forgiven as a young priest in the north. I had been given a book of poetry written by a grade eleven student who did not want her parents to read it. Carelessly, I left the book lying on my coffee table when her parents came to visit. They of course noticed it and read it with delight while I answered a phone call.

I felt afraid, ashamed and angry at myself. Why had I been so careless? Nevertheless, I resolved to be honest and deal with this guilt. At school the next day, I explained to her what had happened, feeling trepidation as to what her reaction would be and how this would affect our relationship. She tapped me on the shoulder, smiled, said simply, “That’s okay, father,” and went on her way. I was filled with relief, joy, gratitude and even a warm feeling of intimate closeness to her and new energy as I travelled all the way to my destination that day. This was a taste of heaven – the new life that Jesus came to give to all of us through the experience of forgiveness. How true the words found in the Benedict us, that Jesus came “to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.” Happy are those who can understand and live this great mystery of our faith in Him.

The Eucharist we celebrate today, as sinners and saints, makes present that love and forgiveness that Jesus showed us on the cross. Through his Word and his Body and Blood, we receive that forgiveness and are empowered and missioned, sent out, to do the same to others.

We have been loved and forgiven. May our lives be an extravagant gesture of grateful love for all others in response to the love that we have received. May God bless us all.