

Eleventh Sunday Per Annum (C)
June 12, 2016.

Therefore, I tell you, her sins which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love (Lk. 7:47).

The touching account of the sinful woman and her great act of love invites us to enter more deeply into the mystery of God and His omnipotence. Last Sunday in our meditation on the Gospel we noted that Jesus Christ is truly *the giver of life* for He restored to life the young son of the widow of Nain. Our Lord can also restore the life of our souls, which, though they can never die or be annihilated, can suffer the death of sin; that is, they can be deprived of sanctifying grace. *A woman in the city, who was a sinner* came to Jesus. It is possible that she had heard of the raising of the widow's son and what was being said: *'A great prophet has risen among us'...* *And this report concerning Him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country (Lk. 7: 16-17).* Or perhaps she had heard what Our Lord had told the disciples of John the Baptist: *Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me' (Lk. 7: 22-23).*

It appears from what we have just heard that while Simon the Pharisee may have taken offence at Him, the sinful woman recognized her own poverty and with evident gratitude received the good news of salvation. Simon inwardly questions what the sinful woman is doing and finds fault with both. St. Gregory observes: *We see the Pharisee really proud in himself, and hypocritically righteous, blaming the sick woman for her sickness, and the physician for his aid....The Physician [i.e. Our Lord] was between two sick persons, but the one preserved her faculties in the fever, the other lost his mental perception. For she wept at what she had done; but the Pharisee, elated with a false sense of righteousness, overrated the vigour of his own health (Catena Aurea, In Lucam, p. 255-256).* The woman was a public sinner; that is, she was known to be living a sinful life. St. Gregory cautions us in this regard: *But when we behold sinners, we must first bewail ourselves for their calamity, since we perhaps have had and are certainly liable to a similar fall. But it is necessary that we should carefully distinguish, for we are bound to make distinction in vices, but to have compassion on nature (Ibid., p. 256).* In other words, we must attend to our own dispositions first. We are all sinners but we must trust in the power of God's mercy. His grace transforms us and makes us new.

Perhaps in our experience of coming to faith in Christ Our Saviour we may be able to point to a similar experience of forgiveness or a moment when we became remarkably aware of God's awesome power and majesty; a power that is most manifest in the exercise of mercy, as Pope Francis notes in the Bull of Indiction for the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy (*Misericordiae Vultus*). Quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, the Holy Father writes: *'It is proper to God to exercise mercy, and He manifests his omnipotence particularly in this way'. Saint Thomas Aquinas' words show that God's mercy, rather than a sign of weakness, is the mark of his omnipotence. For this reason the liturgy, in one of its most ancient collects, has us pray: 'O God, who reveal your power above all in your mercy and forgiveness ...' Throughout the history of humanity, God will always be the One who is present, close, provident, holy, and merciful (#6).*

We must never lose sight of Our Lord's saving mission: *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Lk. 5:32). Our Lord spoke these words at the house of Levi, the tax collector who, in response to Our Lord's call to repentance becomes a new man, Matthew the Apostle and Evangelist. The Gospels are in this sense, a chronicle of lives changed and transformed by the healing grace of Christ. Our privilege each Sunday is to hear these events recounted anew; and as we listen and reflect upon these saving events, we keep in mind the injunction given in the Book of Deuteronomy: *Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget* (Deut. 4:9).

This is the purpose of the Redemptive Incarnation; the deliverance of all humanity from the slavery of sin and death and the slow death of a life besotted by sin and consequently, of a life without purpose and meaning. Human life, not simply in the different functions that people undertake, but in its very essence, is purposeful. The call to repentance is as much a call to truth as it a call to faith in Christ Jesus, the Saviour. Once we come to faith, everything changes because *we* change. *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come* (2 Cor. 5:17). Levi, Mary Magdalene, the Twelve, as our Gospel text reminds us, all of these *as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities...Joanna...Susanna, and many others*, they all accompanied Jesus as *He went through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God* (Cf. Lk. 8:1-3).

This mission to the cities and villages of the world continues in and through us; and for all us, both proclaimers and receivers of the Gospel – and we are simultaneously always one and the other, the one thing necessary is to heed the call to repentance. *Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget* (Deut. 4:9). Forget what? That we must live with a *penitent heart. To regret deeply is to live afresh* (Henry David Thoreau). The life of the sinful woman is renewed and Our Lord says to her, *'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'* (Lk. 7:50). In heeding the call to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus our Saviour, we dispose ourselves to new possibilities; to growth in knowledge and love, in truth and in mercy. To repent is to have an *unconditional readiness to change in order to be transformed in Christ* (Dietrich Von Hildebrand). This is the true and complete meaning of repentance. When we begin to appreciate what this really means we begin also to understand the uniqueness and beauty of Christianity. The *Second Epistle of St. Peter* speaks of our *becoming partakers of the divine nature* (2 Pet. 1:14). This is what the Son of God offers us and what no one else can offer us: a renewal of our human nature.

This conviction of our divine filiation; that we are sons and daughters of God in the Son, bestows on us a dignity that no one and nothing can take away from us provided we continue in His word. So we must make our own our Lord's way of being human. We must learn from Him to be humble and gentle of heart; that we might witness to the truth that God is indeed *rich in mercy* (Eph. 2:4). We must appropriate His identity as Son of the Father and through the grace of daily repentance deepen our awareness of our dignity as children of God. This radical faith and trust in God's love and purpose for each one of us is the strength of the saints, the consolation of sinners; and the confidence of both. The call to repentance is a call to transformation in Christ. For this reason, *faith in Christ is the highest form of repentance* (St. Cyril of Alexandria). May we our devout and reverent worship express both our deep faith and our grateful love for Our Lord and Saviour.