



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

Her many sins must have been forgiven her

Readings: Samuel 12:7-10, 13, Ps 31, Galatians 2:16, 19-21, Luke 7:36-8:3

The Bible talks a lot about sin. Modern people find that uncomfortable.

The Bible talks a lot about sin because it is the single great obstacle between Man and God, the single greatest barrier to Man's hope of happiness and eternity, the single greatest impediment to the transcendent destiny of Man in the Presence of the loving God who made him.

The whole of Scripture, from the Fall of Man in Genesis to the revelation of the Holy City in the Apocalypse is the history of the salvation of Man in the loving purposes of God, the destruction of the besetting power of sin and the liberation of men and women to be joyful sons and daughters of the Most High forever in Heaven. So when the Bible talks about Man's sin and folly it does not do so out of a gloating satisfaction over the doom of Man but as a call to return to the true inheritance of those whom God has made in His own image – you and me.

When the Bible talks about the follies of Man it is utterly candid, some might say ruthless, about even some of the greatest servants of God

St. Peter, the Rock on whom Christ founds His church has some pretty unattractive moments. St. Paul consents to judicial murder. Jonah, who converts Nineveh, is a coward and a moaner. I could go on.

We do not know what the woman in the Gospels has done – my grandmother would have summed it up with the phrase, ‘a woman who is no better than she ought to be’ – leaving us to imagine the full horror of her degradation. What we do know is her gratitude to God.

In the Old Testament however, no punches are pulled. We do know the full enormity of the great king, David’s, sin. Let me remind you.

David has looked down from the roof of his house and seen Bathsheba bathing. In lust he orders her brought to him and sleeps with her, full in the knowledge that she is the wife of one of his closest friends and allies currently fighting at the front in the Ammonite wars, Uriah the Hittite. As misfortune would have it David has made her pregnant. He then panics. He orders Uriah back from the frontline, gets him tipsy and tells him to go and sleep with his wife. In a noble decision that will prove fatal, Uriah says he can’t be indulging himself while his mates are fighting.

Plan B then comes into operation. David sends Uriah back to the army commander bearing his own death warrant. The message is chilling.

‘Put Uriah in the front line then withdraw from him and let the enemy kill him. Then write back to me and give me the all clear.’ Not only is Uriah slain but, as the reply makes clear, several of David’s closest and most faithful men have lost their lives in this squalid subterfuge. Such is the cost of David’s sin.

Nor, as history subsequently makes it clear, does the bloodletting stop there. It will infect the royal house down all its days in civil war and wars of succession and schism and betrayal.

In the midst of all this only one man has the courage to confront David. Nathan, the prophet, at risk of his life, tells David what he has done and what kind of man that makes him – an adulterer, a thief, a liar, a traitor and a murderer. ‘God has given you everything yet you stole the only thing a poor man had.’

A tyrant would have butchered Nathan on the spot but, for all his sinfulness, David is a man of God. He does not bridle or self-justify. He confesses and repents – and receives both absolution and life. He returns to the worship of God.

There can be few more disgraceful episodes in Scripture than David’s sin. Yet, in repentance, David receives forgiveness and a future.

In the Gospel, we can be sure, whatever sins have brought down this poor woman, they are unlikely to match David’s for depravity and premeditated wickedness. But we see, in her response to Jesus, to the living mercy of God, to the Lamb who will be sacrificed for the sins of the

whole world, a gratitude and love and devotion to God that can only come from those who truly know their need of mercy and rejoice in the prodigal generosity of God.

The Pharisee, who has a legalistic relationship with God, is embarrassed by her love and devotion. Yet we, as disciples of Christ, have to kneel with her at Jesus' feet. The very beginning of our Mass is repentance – if we do not do this honestly we can get no farther on the journey of holiness nor can we know the ecstatic joy of reconciliation.

Only by passing through this profound recognition of our need and of God's love for us can we truly respond to His Word and come to the altar of God, into the Crucified, Risen, Ascended and Glorified Presence of Christ and take part in the great Eucharistic prayer, the central prayer of THANKSGIVING.

We love Him because He first loved us. We weep with penitence and joy at His feet because He has set us free with the gift of absolution and life by His Blood shed for us on the Cross.

The Pharisee in us ticks the boxes of what we have done for God. The penitent woman, the ikon of us as church, kneels in heartfelt love and obedience and weeps with joy and overwhelming thanksgiving at the amazing and undeserved mercy of God and the wonder of being in His Presence, here at the table and hereafter in Heaven.

