

**Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
(June 13, 2010)**

Showing Much Love

The Gospel story is a familiar one. But before we consider it listen to how Barbara Reid begins her reflections on today's readings in the current issue of *America*: How do you make amends when you know you have hurt someone deeply, or when you become aware that your patterns of life choices cause great harm to others? Sometimes you can kiss and make up with the hurt person. But at other times it is not possible to repair the damage to the ones directly affected. Even as remorse and relief flood over you when you become the recipient of forgiveness, you search for how to express the love and joy that come from being freed from guilt. Today's Gospel captures a scene in which a woman who was known as a sinner, and who had experienced forgiveness, pours out her joy and gratitude toward Jesus in lavish demonstrations of love.

The obvious theme for today's readings – and perhaps for this homily – is forgiveness. All three readings speak of it. In the first reading from the second Book of Samuel, David has sinned – seriously sinned. He has committed adultery with the beautiful Bathsheba. He has had her husband killed in battle. But when the prophet Nathan confronts him with his sin, he suddenly realizes the seriousness of what he has done and he repents. He is forgiven by a stern but merciful Lord. St. Paul insists that we have been justified by faith: through a crucified Christ our sins have been forgiven. The beautiful Gospel scene teaches unforgettably how forgiveness leads to love, then how love expresses a sinner's gratitude for forgiveness.

What is most striking about the scene is the woman's reaction to Jesus' forgiveness. It's extravagant. It goes beyond all bounds. And it is shocking. It is a sensual act that scandalizes the uptight Pharisee who has invited Jesus for dinner. We wonder, of course, why the Pharisee has invited him. Is it to watch him, as we hear on another similar occasion, trying to catch him out in some mistake he makes or something wrong he does so they will have something to accuse him of? Maybe. But let's not judge him harshly. Jesus tells us not to judge so we will give him the

benefit of a doubt. Perhaps he is quite sincere in inviting this Jesus who has become so popular among the people.

But it's when this woman comes in that just ruins everything. She is quite a distraction, the talk of the town suddenly appearing in their midst, a woman with a reputation. How dare she intrude on this scene! And if he is a prophet how can he not know who she is, and worse still, how can he let her touch him?

And Jesus lets him know he is indeed a prophet. He lets the upright Pharisee know that he knows what he is thinking. Then he chides him for his uncharitable thoughts and reprimands him for not showing him the basic courtesies of hospitality when he arrived, washing his feet, greeting him with a kiss. But she, he says, has not ceased doing this since she came in.

I like to think that the woman in the story stands for everything that Jesus has come to do in this world. Through her, Jesus lets us know that God did not want to keep his distance from sinful humanity. Instead God took on our human flesh, became one of us to let us all know how much he loved us, how willing he was to forgive us, and how eager to go out of his way to help us. From the moment he was born he literally reached out to us. Not only to the arms of his mother and foster father, but to a dead twelve-year-old girl and Peter's fevered mother-in-law, to the blind and the deaf, to lepers and an epileptic, to Peter sinking in the sea and the children his disciples tried to keep from him. He not only touched others but he let them touch him. He even let Judas betray him with a kiss.

We don't know if many responded to his love the way the woman in our story did: with an extravagance that seemed to know no bounds and no shame. But we know that others did respond. In the verses following the story Luke tells us of other women that Jesus had somehow touched, women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities and who in gratitude had followed him, providing for him out of their resources.

Well we have all been forgiven by this good and gracious God of ours. We have been touched by a love that begs to love him in return. It seems to me these women show us the best way to return that love: by serving others, by looking to the needs of those around us. Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say that she looked into the eyes of the poor and needy all

around her and she saw the eyes of Jesus looking back at her. That's what made it easy to do what she was doing for the least of his brothers and sisters. And that's what can make it easy for us to do the same.