

24th Thursday of Ordinary Time I 2021

1 Timothy 4:12-16

Beloved: Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

Until I arrive, attend to the reading, exhortation, and teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands by the presbyterate.

Be diligent in these matters, be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to everyone.

Attend to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in both tasks, for by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

Luke 7:36-50

A certain Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table.

Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." Jesus said to him in reply,

"Simon, I have something to say to you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both.

Which of them will love him more?"

Simon said in reply, "The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven."

He said to him, "You have judged rightly."

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered.

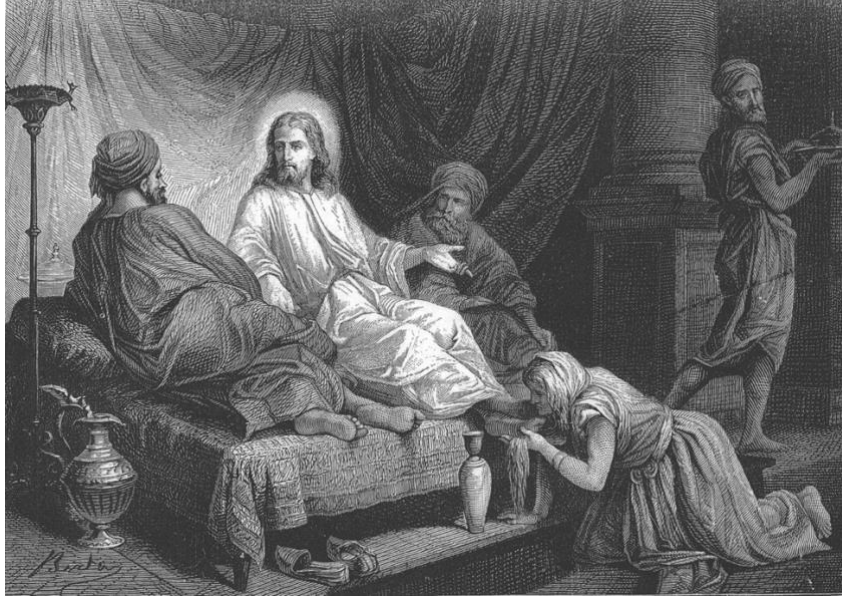
You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love.

But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little."

He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The others at table said to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."



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The Pharisee says: *"She is a sinner.*
Jesus says: *"She has shown great love."*

But, is the Pharisee wrong?

Our narrator, St. Luke, no less, says, *"Now there was a sinful woman in the city."*

Her sinfulness is not contested.

We've been taughtⁱ that sin is *an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."* (St. Thomas Aquinas)

The consequence of sin is injured relationship. It injures our relationship with God and each other. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God. This isn't merely justice; this is the natural consequence... like how we understand the consequences of gravity.

The repair is not in a person's power. It requires the divine initiative of forgiveness. Our hope is in God's mercy.

In this, the Pharisee and the sinful woman are alike. They both require that which only God can give: forgiveness.

That of course is why the other guests are affronted when Jesus offers the divine initiativeⁱⁱ. I mean, who does Jesus think he is? We, of course, have Luke and the other Gospels to tell us exactly who Jesus is.

Even if we grant the assumption that the Pharisee has complied with the law more fastidiously than the woman, none are good next to the holiness of God and none attain on their own the holiness we are called to.

We require God's grace. We cannot earn it; but we can accept it. It is undeserved gift.

The Pharisee's arrogance deprives himself of the humility necessary to be able to receive undeserved gift. It's like trying to accept a gift with a closed fist.

Love conquers all arrogance. There is no room for self in love. There is a desire only for the good of the other. Love sacrifices all for the good of the other.

Our woman's lavishing of love upon Jesus with her tears and oils is her response to Jesus, who is the very personification of love.

We speak of our worship as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This is our participation in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. He withholds nothing in love for us. He offers a life in Him.

Come to his altar to receive Him, body and blood, soul and divinity. Leave your arrogance behind. When you are beset by intrusive ideas of how you may be better than other sinners, cry out for help, "Come, Holy Spirit. Purge me. Burn away my arrogance!"

Come to Jesus in humility. Come to Jesus with your tears of love. Come into his very life.

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ⁱ Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1849

ⁱⁱ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., *Biblical Meditations for Ordinary Time- Weeks 23-34*, p. 42