

Third Sunday after Trinity
June 16, 2013
Homily for the Anglican Use Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 7:36-8:3

Most everyone recognizes the connection each Sunday between the Scripture we read and the theme we then hear in the hymns and anthems we sing at Mass. That is, they match. Today I want to point out that one more piece here fits with the others. The Collect of the Day, which I pray on your behalf just after the Gloria, also indicates the emphasis, we could even call it the intention, of all our prayers on a given Sunday. This morning those three parts of the Mass match particularly well. The Collect asks God that by His help “. . . we may proclaim thy truth with boldness and minister thy justice with compassion.”

This really is what Jesus does in our Gospel today. On the one hand he proclaims to Simon, His Pharisee host, the truth about the connection between forgiveness and love; and, on the other hand, He shows compassion for the woman who feels great remorse for the sins of her past life. Our collect today asks God that we will be able to do the same thing: speak the truth without compromise, while at the same time showing compassion to the very people who need the truth so desperately.

Herein we have the third step in our theme of evangelization that we have adopted for this year's St. Thomas More Novena. On Friday, I talked about the sacrifices we make in order to fund and foster evangelization. And yesterday, I noted that such sacrifices are rooted in love, the same love that led Jesus to sacrifice Himself for us. Today we see that love, our love that propels us to share the Good News with others, proceeds from forgiveness. He whose many sins are forgiven loves much, but he who is forgiven little loves little.

In confronting sin the Church is beset with this challenge, that she does so without condemning the people who are sinning. We remember here the words in chapter three of St. John's Gospel, that Jesus came into the world not to condemn the world, but to save it. Therefore, the message of salvation cannot become obscured by the Church's concurrent message that much of what man does is contrary to the will of God. How do we hate the sin, while loving the sinner?

Jesus gives us the answer in His lecture to Simon the Pharisee. The analogy He uses has to do with monetary debt, and Simon recognizes that he whose debt is forgiven will love his creditor commensurate with the size of the loan that has been forgiven. If he is forgiven more, he will love more. Applied to sin, this means that the harlot that washes Jesus' feet with her tears and hair and then anoints them with ointment she has provided loved Jesus more because her sins were so much greater than Simon's. This is not to say that Simon had not sinned, only that his sins were not as grave. His lack of hospitality is rooted in his lack of awareness of the degree to which he needs God's forgiveness.

Jesus here is telling us that our charity will persist so long as we have before our gaze the forgiveness we have received from Him. For us who are weak, love for the sinner in our midst is tied up inextricably with our own forgiveness, the forgiveness we ourselves have received. When we forget the forgiveness God has granted us, we become like Simon, and we look down in condemnation upon the notoriously wicked instead of seeing them as God's children in need of redemption. How we have been

treated by God must be the basis for how we treat others; and when we are grateful that we ourselves have not been condemned, we are less apt to condemn others.

Running through this same lesson, however, is an additional incentive for us to refrain from condemning the notorious sinner. Jesus' orientation towards the woman is not that of stranger to stranger. Though they do not know each other—we don't know that they had ever met before—Jesus allows her to be familiar with Him, a familiarity that would make us uncomfortable if a stranger were to do the same thing to our feet. We'd likely ask her what she was doing and if she might stop. But Jesus allows her to complete this act of love because he also loves her. And not because He had been forgiven. He didn't need any forgiveness. He loves her because He knows her. She can be familiar with Jesus because she belongs to His family. He had, after all, as the second person of the Holy Trinity, had a role in her creation; and though they had not met, he had known her since her conception in the womb. Her coming to Him was a reunion of sorts and His love for her is rooted in the fact that she is one His children.

On this Father's Day we, too, understand this familial tie as the basis for love. The father who loves his children must throughout his life walk the line between refusing to condone bad behavior, while at the same time refusing to condemn his children for their misdeeds. His refusal to condemn is not based so much on the forgiveness he has received from God as it is for the profound love he has for the fruit of his union with his wife. And this deep and abiding love endures through every kind of trial, not least of all those trials that come about because of his children's bad choices. This familial love is thus a powerful incentive to minister justice with compassion and keep his children tethered to both the family and the faith in which the family is raised. The good father knows that judgment will lead his children to seek compassion elsewhere from people who do not love his children as he does.

Our evangelization efforts will be aided, therefore, if we refrain from condemning the sinner because we recognize our own need for forgiveness. But these same efforts will become solidified and endure externally if we show the sinner the same familial love that Jesus showed the remorseful harlot. The question is not whether we can love our weak brothers and sisters because we know we should. Rather, the question is whether we can love them because with all our heart and soul we want to. Can we love our weak neighbor as a good father loves his only daughter?

The success of the enterprise to which we have committed ourselves here in Providence hinges on the answer we give to this question. If this parish is one whose people know they will be loved because we want to love them, they will come in droves. They will come to receive here what too often they have not received in their own families. May we be the means by which our neighbor experiences the saving love Jesus has offered to all.