

11<sup>th</sup> Sunday 07

Our first reading from the second book of Samuel tells us about a conversation between King David and the prophet Nathan. David had an affair with a woman named Bathsheba who became pregnant. To conceal his fatherhood of the child, David sent for Bathsheba's husband, a soldier named Uriah, and gave him a furlough in the hope that he would have relations with his wife, However, the unsuspecting Uriah refused to go home when there was a war on. And so David had him placed in the middle of the troops where the fighting was the fiercest and then gave instructions to the general to withdraw the troops so that Uriah would be killed. So David became a murderer in order to conceal his adultery.

Somehow the prophet Nathan has found him out and confronts him, and you remember how he did this. He came to David with a story about a very poor man who had one little lamb who drank from his own cup and slept in his bosom and a rich man who had many sheep. When the rich man had company, instead of taking one of his many sheep to prepare a meal for his guests, he took the poor man's one sheep. When David heard the story, he became angry and told Nathan: that man deserves to die. Then David said

to him: You are that man. You had many wives. Uriah had jus one. Yet you took her and then had him killed.

But David, the adulterer and murderer, then steps forward and admits his sins: I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan then tells him that since he had acknowledged his sinfulness, he will not die. However, the child will die.

I am not sure but I don't think there is a good movie about David. Yet he would be such good material. A murderer, an adulterer, but also a man who finds the strength to own up to his own sinfulness. And that, I suppose, is the lesson we can learn from him. We should take responsibility for our actions, especially our bad actions, our sins. We should not try to blame others. We should not try to shirk our sins. We should simply admit them: I have sinned, and then try to move on. You can't get clean, someone said, by rolling in the muck of your past sins. No, you have to move on. But first you must own them.

I suppose you could say that the man who hosts Jesus in today's gospel story is the very opposite of David. He never says: I have sinned. He is completely unaware of his own sinfulness. Therefore he does not feel the need to ask for forgiveness. But he can spot

another person's sinfulness with absolute clarity. Looking at the woman who has entered his house and is now washing Jesus' feet with her tears and drying them with her hair, he says to himself: this Jesus is no prophet because if he were he would know immediately what kind of woman is touching him is. She is a sinner.

There is something strange about this whole scene. Why did this Pharisee invite Jesus to dine at his home and then not offer him the usual courtesies: the washing of feet, a kiss of greeting, an anointing with oil? Was he admitting these courtesies purposely in order to insult his guest? But why invite a guest in order to treat him insultingly? That is strange.

Jesus explains both his behavior and that of the woman. The woman offers Jesus all these courtesies because she has experienced God's forgiveness of her sins and wants to express her gratitude for this divine forgiveness. She is a healed sinner. She thinks of herself as a serious sinner, but she sees God's forgiveness as even greater than her serious sins. That is why she is so grateful. That is why she is bathing Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. For to her Jesus stands in for God, for his divine forgiveness. The host, on the other hand, has no sense of

his own sinfulness, and so no action such as those of the woman come from him. All he sees is the woman's sinfulness and Jesus' unawareness of this fact. Of course, he is wrong on both counts. Jesus does recognize the woman's sinfulness, but he also recognizes her repentant love. And Jesus also sees what the host cannot see, his own sinfulness.

Do you sometimes get nervous about your lack of sinfulness? After all, the liturgy and the Scriptures constantly insist on the fact that we are sinners. And yet I think we often think to ourselves: I am not so bad. I am trying to do what is right. I have my faults, but.... Let us believe the Church. Let us also ask God for the grace to be more like David in his frank recognition of his own sinfulness: I have sinned. Maybe we should even ask the Lord to reveal our sinfulness to us, though a little but at a time so that we will not be overwhelmed by it and lose heart. And let us also pray that we will be more merciful in our judgment of the sinfulness of others. So often we can see the speck in the other person's eye but don't know the plank in our own.

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