

Year C 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Sm 12:7-10, 13; Ps 32; Gal 2:16, 19-21; Lk 7:36-8:3

This Sunday's topic is forgiveness. David, the great king, was not content with all that he had received from the Lord; coveting Bathsheba as he watched her bathe, he made her pregnant, and sought to cover his tracks by getting her husband drunk so that he would have sex with her. But Uriah was fighting in a holy war and abstinence was mandated, so David wound up ordering that he be placed where the fighting was most fierce, and he was killed. The prophet Nathan tactfully scolded him, but David's first child of Bathsheba died. The second would be Solomon. 2 Sm 11-12. Solomon's nickname was "Beloved of Yahweh," just as "David" in Hebrew comes from the verb "to love."

Forgiveness is an act of love. It is like the cancellation of a debt, and so it is a gift. Guilt eats away at us, but the loving act of forgiveness heals us. In the Bible, "to forgive" and "to heal" are interchangeable: compare Is 6:10 with Mk 4:12. And such healing is "salvation," as in the case of the woman with the blood flow, Mk 5:28-29, 34. This was what the sinful woman in our gospel reading experienced. She seems to have been desperate for healing, for forgiveness. Maybe she was a prostitute, as the tradition has it. She was broken, she felt like a mere object, used, without value or dignity. But at the sight of Jesus, who exuded love and a healing, loving acceptance, her dormant love, repressed in her hard life, came rushing out in unabashed abundance, and she lavished Jesus with a sincere affection mindless of the disapproving stares of the Pharisee who was stingy with his love.

The woman's vulnerability and self-surrender enabled her to truly encounter God's saving love in the person of Jesus. She was not calculating like Simon the Pharisee, who received only a small amount (cf. Lk 6:36-38). She had found the Spirit of love with which Jesus had been anointed (the Spirit which would make of Jesus a holocaust of self-giving love, Heb 9:14). This is the Spirit which is poured forth abundantly into our hearts, Rom 5:1-5. Paul experienced God's love in manifested in Jesus in such a way that he wanted to live only in Christ, even to be crucified with Christ and share his sufferings, as long as he was with Christ, Phil 3:7-11.

Tradition has often identified the sinful woman with Mary Magdalene, but the most we can say for sure is that Mary was another tormented soul healed by Christ.