

Commentary to the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel Summary



Luke's gospel is notable for its portrayal of Jesus as one who represents the compassion and forgiveness of God. No doubt this sensitivity of Luke for the generous nature of Jesus came from his own experience as a native of the city of Antioch where he noted the extremes of wealth and poverty and where he noted also that the rich tended to be self-righteous and judgmental and therefore to assume that the poor were sinful just because they were poor.

In this gospel story, Luke draws a sharp contrast between the smug and self-righteous Pharisee who keeps all the rules but does not have the sensitivity to perform the basic acts of kindness toward a guest and the woman who has a reputation for sinfulness but who receives Jesus with loving service. The woman's reputation for sinfulness could be no more than her inability to keep all the prescriptions of the Law due to her poverty. However that may be, there is no doubt that she understands the importance of loving service just as the Pharisee is totally devoid of such sensitivity.

Jesus makes his point by telling a story about two debtors who owed very different amounts but who were both forgiven. The one who was forgiven more was more likely to be more grateful and loving also, We all need to be forgiven at one time or another, and God is more than ready to forgive us also, but the consequence should be loving gratitude and better behavior in the future and especially more ready to forgive others.

Life Implications



Since it is so difficult to be consistently loving and forgiving persons, we are tempted to take care of the appearances only and thereby to acquire a reputation for virtuous living as we continue to indulge our tendency to be judgmental and unforgiving. I had occasion one time to give a homily on the gospel story about the Pharisee and the publican. To make my point more forcefully, I tried to describe what Pharisees would look like if they were living today in one of our parishes. I noted, for example, that they would certainly attend Mass on Sunday but, on the way home, they would not hesitate to do a critical and negative assessment of other people they had seen at Mass. After the Mass, a man came to the sacristy and said to me: “Father, I think I may be a Pharisee.” I was at a loss to respond at first but then I said to him: “My friend, take courage. What you have just said is something that a real Pharisee would never say!”

It is indeed laudable to attend Mass and to take seriously all the rules of good Christian conduct, but all of this careful observance can be spoiled if it is not accompanied by a genuine spirit of love and forgiveness

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