

## Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Sep 20th 2018

Memorial of Saints Andrew Kim Tae-gon, Priest, and Paul Chong Ha-sang, and Companions, Martyrs  
A few years ago, I took my five-year nephew to the toy store. He ran around the store with joy, pointing to all the toys he wanted with great excitement. Unfortunately, he became too excited and wet his pants in the store. A look of horror and dread spread across his face as he realized what happened. For my part, I could barely suppress my laughter as I reflected on how someone could be so passionate about something that they lose control over their bodily functions. So even though my nephew committed one of the worst sins a five-year old can do and he expected me to respond with anger, I just didn't have it in me. Instead, I assured him that it was OK. Mistakes happen. I told him that he would do better next time. I read his reaction like a book: surprise followed by relief followed by love and acceptance.

We don't know what sins the woman committed that prompted her to wash the feet of Jesus. We do know that Jesus compares her sins to a large debt. He notes that her "many sins" have been forgiven. But she was not forgiven because of her act of love. She experienced God's forgiveness first and then responded with gratitude by bathing, kissing and anointing the feet of Jesus. Although her sins were "many" the Gospel passage does not emphasize them. Instead, Jesus lists her many acts of love.

We know our sins. God especially knows our sins. We certainly need to see ourselves as sinners, but it can't stop there. We also need to see ourselves as children of God in whom God delights. We need to see ourselves as recipients of God's love and mercy. I recall the words of Jesuit General Congregation 32: "What is it to be a Jesuit? It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus..."

The sinful woman knew of her "many" sins. But she also experienced God's forgiveness and responded by becoming a companion of Jesus. When we approach God with our sins to seek forgiveness and mercy, we may feel the anxiety of a five-year old with wet pants. But when we experience the infinite mercy of God, how do we respond? Do we respond, out of gratitude, with acts of love?

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