

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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In today's gospel lesson we see a really *striking* contrast between *Simon* the Pharisee, who's *forgiven* little and *loves* little, and the sinful woman, who *loved* much and has been *forgiven* much.

- Now, Jesus tells us that *nothing* matters *more* than loving *God* and our *neighbor* with everything we *have* and everything we *are*, so whether we're able to love *much* or just a *little* is *hugely* important.
- What we're seeing here is the difference love makes when it enters and matures in a relationship.

In a relationship *without* love, *nothing* changes.

- Who we *are* and what we *want* remains the *same*, and the relationship is based on me being *happy* and *getting* what I *want*.
- I'll make *some* compromises, but that's *really* just *negotiation*.
- *Repentance* is basically just *accounting* – fixing the circumstances to maintain something that's good for *me*.
- If it starts to seem like I'm *not* being served by the *relationship*, either something's got to *change* or the relationship is going to *end*.

Now, in a relationship with a mature *love*, *everything* changes.

- Love transforms us and our desires, so that we point our lives in the direction of *another* person and *their* well-being, and to find *our* joy and satisfaction in *that*.
- Compromises then are *really* about negotiating with *ourselves*, to gradually grow in our ability *not* to get our way.
- Because this is a *process*, *repentance* is what happens when we *see* the reality of what our *selfishness* has done in the relationship and are moved to *heal* it.

We see a great example of this at the first Pentecost.

- In response to the confusion and amazement of the pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem for the festival, *Peter* proclaims the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- These are *faithful* Jews who *genuinely* love their God, so when they hear *reality* of who Jesus of Nazareth is, Luke tells us that they're "*cut to the heart,*" and "they cry out, "Brethren what should we *do?*"
- Peter tells them, "*Repent and be baptized,*" and gives us a perfect picture of the transformation *true* repentance *brings*.

We might just as easily understand "repent and be baptized" as "*turn* around and *point* your life in *another* direction, *Jesus'* direction."

- To "*be baptized*" doesn't mean a *one-time* event, like paying off a debt to fix your *circumstances*.
- It means *a whole new life*, that it is no longer *us* who live, but *Jesus* who lives *in* us, as Paul writes to the Galatians.

This is *especially* important for *us*, who have *begun* a relationship with Jesus and are trying to rise from *good* to *better*.

- The *reason* is that when we just take a *glance* at our lives, it might be easy to *conclude* that we're in pretty good shape.
- We're not *perfect*, of course, but we're *definitely* not the sinful woman of the city in today's *gospel* lesson.

This is a *really* dangerous place to *be* because even though we still have a *daily* *need* to turn around and point our lives in *Jesus'* direction, it's not as *easy* for us to be "*cut to the heart.*"

- We don't *confess* much because we've *settled* for *who* we are and *what* we'll *offer* to God in the relationship.
 - If you want to *test* this, start thinking about what more you could offer to God or do for your neighbor and the internal *negotiating* will start almost *immediately*.

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- And so we can easily slip into a *comfortable* space where we go through the *motions* of repentance, but we're not *transformed*.

Jesus is speaking to that *exact* thing in his parable of the 2 *debtors*.

- I'm *always* cut to the heart when Jesus points out that it's the one with the *greater* debt that loves *more*, as if I'm wearing an "I followed Jesus and all I got was this lousy *t-shirt...and* a place in the divine love of the One who created the universe, I *guess*."
- And that right *there* is the reminder of *just how much* forgiveness and love is *really* available to *me*.

What we *always* have to keep in *mind* is that even though *one's* debt was 10x greater than the *other's*, it didn't *matter*; *neither* of them could pay it *back*.

- We are *all* dead in our *sin*, *even* if it's not as *obvious*.
- For example, I can't *really* consider myself *less* sinful than someone else if instead of *praising God* for *preserving* me from the pain and woundedness of *sin*, I'm *resentful* of all the *fun* they had breaking the rules.
- The closer we come to God, the more clearly we'll see all the smaller things that stand between us;
- Our affection for sin, how attractive it is, our inordinate attachment to things that keep us from him, the calls to us that go unanswered, his desires for us that get left unfulfilled, and on, and on.

You see, even on our best days, we still have a long way to go – and we should rejoice at that.

- So take time this week to pray for a greater awareness of God's presence in your life and an increased sensitivity to his prompts and nudges.
- God is not close to being done with us or having nothing left to offer, so pray for him to keep pouring more of himself into your life.
- Because the difference between loving much and loving little isn't what Jesus is offering, but what we're willing to receive.

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