

Fr. Joe Bambenek
11th Sunday in Ordinary
June 12, 2010
Christ the King, Ann Arbor

2 Samuel 12:7-10,13

Psalm 3

Galatians 2:16,19-21

Luke 7:36-8:3

It is good to be back, and it is good to see many friendly faces in the pews today. Now, there is no need to raise your hands when I ask this question... but here is a question for you to ponder: how many of you know someone who is never wrong? When something happens, it's never their fault. They never say they are sorry; they always have an excuse. So if you know someone like that... how much do you enjoy their presence? Isn't it often difficult to be around such people?

Yet as I was thinking about our relationship with God, and the relationship of humanity with God over time, how often is that the case? Think about the very start of sin, Adam and Eve in the Garden. God confronts Adam and Eve with their sin, and what does Adam do? He turns his finger to Eve and says, 'the one that you gave me, she caused me to do it.' How often throughout the Bible, and throughout our lives, do people not take responsibility for their sins, and point to something else. In some ways, it is no wonder that God wanted to wipe us all out with the Flood. And then we think about the plight of the prophets – those people God sends to challenge us in ways we could be living our lives better. So often, they are persecuted, if not killed. For those who have been going to daily Mass this week; this week has been the story of Elijah on the run from wicked King Ahab. Ahab did not like what Elijah was saying, so Elijah had to hide in a cave. He had to run away from him into the desert. He had to trust God a lot for his very food. He also, along the way, had the chance to cut the throats of a few false prophets. But the story continues on into this coming week. The story of this dramatic match-up. But there is an interesting twist we will find out, come Tuesday or Wednesday, I think it is Tuesday. Ahab ultimately converts. He ultimately admits he is wrong; and immediately, immediately, God's grace and God's forgiveness comes.

And we hear the story also today; the story of Nathan confronting David. Now how scary that must have been for Nathan to be letting the king know exactly what the king had done wrong. I've heard, although I have not done the research on this myself, that this story is the first time that someone actually responded positively, in the whole Bible, to a prophet's message. Every other time, up until then, the messenger of bad news, got bad news, when he gave the message. But the delightful thing about David is that when David, who had probably been blinded... often when we get caught in sin, we begin to not see what we are doing. Probably blinded by the sin that he had committed, and the sins that kind of fell like dominos. When he was confronted with it, he immediately converted. He immediately begged for mercy; and God's messenger immediately gave it to him. I think back to one of my scripture classes, the scripture scholar was struggling with why David is treated so well in the Bible, one of the most beloved people of all in the Bible, whereas Saul, his predecessor, ultimately gets his kingship taken from him and he does not fare so well in history. And this professor was saying, if you look at their two lives, what David did, in many, many different ways, was often worse than what Saul did. And she struggled with why is David treated so well and Saul treated, thought of, so lowly.

There may be multiple reasons for that (disparity), but today's reading, I think, hits a key one, if not the key one. Ultimately, David repented. David converted. It is a beautiful,

beautiful, powerful reminder to us that no matter what we have done; no matter what we have done; God is ready to forgive us. God stands there with open arms waiting to forgive us.

This morning, as a priest now for two weeks, I had the first opportunity to sit in the confessional. And how amazing that is, to serve in some ways as the prophet in today's story of Nathan. For people to come, and to bring their sins and to with faith, with the faith that Jesus has promised us, say "you are forgiven." What a load that takes off of their hearts, and the beauty of full restoration.

Now, of course, when we do convert, after we have done something bad and God says, we are told, "you are forgiven," the Devil does not like that. And he wants to work on us. He wants to make us think that 'well maybe we're not really forgiven. Maybe I am going to be bad for the rest of my life, maybe there is nothing really I can do good for God.' But that is not the message of the gospel we hear today, nor is that the message of the life of David. David is one of the most beloved servants of God because he repented. In the gospel, we hear what our response should be to the gift of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift. It is a gift that we do not earn, but we receive it through our faith as we heard in the second reading. And what did the woman do, who had sinned and now is forgiven? She showed deep gratitude. She showed deep love. Love and gratitude are the proper response to the gift of forgiveness. Not shame, but love and gratitude. A life given in love. And we hear how she went on, to journey from town to town with Him, after she repented. She served and she loved. And that is what we are called to do: to serve and to love and to be grateful.

Today is a day of a different kind of gratitude for me. It is a day when I thank God for the gift of the priesthood, and I thank God for the gift of this parish, and I thank God for the gift of many people who I see before me in the pews; people who have touched my life in many different ways: from the working world, to school, to my professors who have contributed mightily to my formation. I'm thankful, in particular, to Fr. Ed, who helped in my formation in the pre-theology program, and who was in Minnesota two weeks ago to celebrate with me the ordination. I spent a little bit of time this afternoon in the Adoration Chapel... I am thankful to all those who have so faithfully kept that chapel going. That chapel in which Jesus can speak to our hearts in such powerful ways. I am thankful to the prayer team members. There was one moment that changed my life when I was prayed over here. I thought I knew what I was doing in terms of heading toward the priesthood, but the extra grace the Holy Spirit gave me was just tremendous. So thank you to all of you involved in the prayer team ministry. I am thankful for the many good men who have come from here: Fr. Jeff Huard, who was a spiritual director this year at the Seminary. We have Andrew Brinkman and Kyle Kowalczyk in formation now for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. This parish almost seems to be annexed to the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis with several of us coming from here going there. And finally, I am very thankful for the tremendous example of faith this parish has given to me, and for the many, many prayers that have been said for me during the years of formation since I left here.

So as we go forth from here, let us remember that we don't want to be that person who is never wrong. The person who can never say they are sorry. Rather, we want to say we are sorry to the great and loving God; to receive His grace; and to move forward in life, leaving the mistakes of the past behind us. Going forward with love, with joy, and with gratitude.