

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
June 13, 2010
Fr. Joe Bambenek
St. Peter's Forest Lake

2 Samuel 12:7-10 12,13 Psalm 32,1 Galatians 2:16,19-21 Luke 7:36-8,3

Now there is no need to raise your hands when I ask this question... but how many of you know someone who is never wrong? When something happens, it is never their fault. They never feel like they have to say they are sorry; they always have an excuse. If you know someone like that... how much do you enjoy their presence? Is it not difficult to be around such people?

But yet, as I was thinking about it, we humans are often that way with God, whether it be in our own lives, or whether it be in the history of salvation. After all, think back to Adam, at the very start, the very first sin. God confronts him naked in the Garden. And what does Adam say: 'it was her, the one that you gave me, that caused me to do this!' And it has kind of rippled down through history just like that. So when you think about it, about how ungrateful and unwilling to take responsibility humans have been, it is pretty understandable why God sent the Flood and almost wiped us all out.

We can also think about the prophets. How many times are they persecuted, if not killed, when they are sent to confront people who do not like to admit that they are making a mistake? There are many stories of the prophets, and those who have been going to daily Mass this week have heard the story of Elijah who has been on the run from evil King Ahab. Elijah had to hide in a cave. He was in such dire straits that he had to be provided for miraculously by ravens. Of course, along the way he got to cut the throats of a bunch of false prophets, but that just made Ahab even more mad, and Queen Jezebel. The battle between God's messenger Elijah and the evil King Ahab will continue this week in the daily Masses.

But in today's first reading we hear a very different story. The prophet Nathan confronts David, and for what might be the first time in the Bible, when a prophet confronts someone; instead of him losing his head, David repents. I haven't personally done the research, but I did hear somewhere that this is the first time in the Bible when someone is confronted with their evil actions actually repented.

So when Nathan courageously confronted David, David's eyes were opened. We can think about what it is like to be in the situation of sin. Normally we don't just do really bad things out of nowhere. Often we are led down a little path, and become blind to what we are doing. So when Nathan confronted David, as bad as it obviously was, he was likely blind, at least to some of the badness that he had done. But when he saw the evil, he was repulsed by it, and he said I'm sorry. And immediately what was the response? The response of Nathan, David's prophet, was forgiveness; immediate forgiveness.

One time I heard a scripture scholar lamenting about the fate of Saul, the predecessor of David, who is not very well thought of in the Bible, and the fate of David. If you look at what the two of them did... Saul, disobeyed a few little things here and there; but in comparison to what David did on the human level, David was much worse. So why is it that we think so highly of David, and so lowly of Saul? Why did God take away the kingship from Saul and make David one of his most beloved? There may be several reasons, but I think today's story of

David's repentance; David's willingness to say I'm sorry and seek forgiveness, has to be at the core, if not the core of the difference, of the very different fate of those two.

I go back also to the story of Ahab and Elijah. On Tuesday I think it is, when it looks like Ahab is finally going to get what he deserves. He has very unjustly had an innocent man killed. Elijah is sent to confront him, and what happens? Ahab also repents. And what also happens? He is immediately forgiven, and with it, the bad that was about to be done to him. His life was about to be taken, but suddenly he is spared.

So coming from these stories, what can we learn? I think there are a couple lessons.

The first is that regardless of whatever we have done, however bad it has been... when you think about what David did, it was pretty bad... God stands ready and willing to forgive us. He is there with loving, with open arms, to bring us back to Him. Not because we deserve it, as we heard in the second reading, there is nothing we can do to earn forgiveness. But it is a gift, a gift of love, a gift we can receive in faith.

Yesterday morning I had a powerful experience of this, when for the first time, in a somewhat unexpected way, I found myself in the confessional. How powerful that was, to have people come to me, standing in the place of Jesus, asking for the forgiveness of sins. And me being able to say, with confidence, in faith, that they are forgiven. Like Nathan saying to David, "your sins are forgiven." Like Jesus saying to the woman in the gospel, "Your sins are forgiven."

Now, when we do turn and seek forgiveness, the Devil does not like it. He is not happy that we are now free from our sin. So he can't make us be guilty again, but he can help weigh us down with shame. He can get us to think that 'because I have done this horrible thing in the past, God can't really love me, even though He says that I am forgiven. And I can't really be used for good anymore, because I have this thing in my closet. Even though I am forgiven of it, somehow God just can't use me for good.' Today's gospel reading reminds us of how wrong that is. The woman, instead of responding with shame, responded with a spirit of service, a spirit of deep love, and a spirit of deep generosity. So that is the lesson that we can take from the mercy that God gives us. That the only response to that gift, that beautiful gift, is love, service and generosity. So let us, when we are forgiven, be generous and grateful.

Today is a day of gratitude of a different sort. I return here to St. Peter's to say thank you. To say thank you to God for the gift of priesthood, and to say thank you to all of you for how you nourished my vocation and helped me prepare and grow last summer. In fact, as I was putting together this sermon I realized a providential occurrence; for it was one year ago today, one year ago actually this very hour, that I first stepped into this church. I walked in here, and within a minute or two I ran into Connie Riemers, who was diligently putting away things after a funeral. And it was Connie who was the very first one who said "Hello Fr. DeGrood, how are you?" Words that I would hear another time, even before I would leave the building; words that I would hear often during the course of the summer; and words, literally, I would hear when I went to Nativity two and a half weeks ago for the very first time. The first person that approached me was staring at me for the longest time and said, "Do you know that you look so much like Fr. Don DeGrood?" So as that [Connie's greeting] was a good start to a wonderful summer here at St. Peter's, let's hope that my first greeting at Nativity being a welcome as Fr. Don DeGrood is also a good omen for my time at Nativity.

If I were to express gratitude to everyone, I see so many people here I would like to thank, we would be here an awful long time and I would certainly forget someone. In every

post-Mass word of thanks so far I have managed to omit at least one person who was at the top of my list to be sure and thank. So I won't point out any other people, other than to say thank you so much Fr. DeGrood, for being a wonderful mentor, for taking me on last summer, and for helping me to grow so much. Let me say thank you for what a great parish this is, and what a great witness of the Body of Christ you all are [at St. Peter's. You are] A great witness of what Vatican II has called us to: to live out the universal call to holiness, to follow God in each and every unique way that He made each and every one of you: to be His instruments of love; His instruments of mercy; and His instruments of reconciliation in the world.

As we go forth from here today, let us not be that obnoxious person who always has to be right and can never say they are sorry. Instead, let us be people who turn to God when we sin; who seek His mercy; and then go forth in gratitude, mercy, and loving service.