

Deacon David Olsen

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

13 June 2010

A decade or so ago, my wife and I were very involved in youth ministry in our local community. We not only volunteered with the youth in our parish, we also ran a youth coffee house called the Upper Room in our small town. The Upper Room was a safe haven where kids who had nowhere else to turn could come and find acceptance, love and fellowship. Many of these kids came to us from very difficult, traumatic pasts; broken homes, drugs, life on the street, and more than one teenage girl who had sold her body to survive.

Yet, from the depths of their darkness, burdened and overwhelmed by the weight of their sins, Christ found them and brought them into the light of His salvation. Intimately aware of the life they had been saved from and the immensity of the sin that had been forgiven; they were unashamedly on fire for Jesus. They would walk with their heads held high, worship Him wherever they were, and enthusiastically share their story whenever they could. Their love for Jesus and their gratitude for a new life emanated from the very core of their being. They refused to let anyone or any circumstance suppress their expression of love and thanksgiving for what Jesus had done for them in their lives. For me, they were living, breathing examples of the woman in today's gospel – They loved much because they had been forgiven much – Great had been their sin.

Great had been King David's sins as well, maybe a little too great for us to relate to his story. After all, there aren't many of us here that have the opportunity to abuse the power and position of royalty, and probably fewer of us that can include adultery and murder on our list of sins. This is

why I so enjoy the biblical stories which prominently place these unnamed characters at the center of the plot; it makes it easier to see ourselves in them. An unnamed woman, committing untold and uncounted sins, it's almost as if St. Luke is telling us; "Insert your name and your sins here in the blanks. See yourself as part of the story." And indeed we can see ourselves as part of the story, for we are all keenly aware of our own personal sins.

We must not let our focus stray however, for even though sin is part of our fallen nature and a serious issue that we must address, it's not the point of today's readings. What made King David a man after God's own heart; or the sinful woman so grateful that her love flowed freely; or my old youth group so on fire that they were virtually fearless in their witness, what made them who they were, and who they are today, was not their sins, but the recognition that God had forgiven their sins. This forgiveness is available to all of us, and like the unnamed woman, our many sins can be forgiven as well. There is of course, a pre-condition that must be met before we can receive God's forgiveness, we must recognize and acknowledge our sinfulness.

Our reading from the Book of Samuel today illustrates this for us as we heard Nathan recount, in detail, David's sins. The reading ends not with denials, excuses or justification from David, but with a simple, direct confession, "*I have sinned against the Lord.*" Not surprisingly, our Psalm today, which is attributed to King David, affirms this attitude as well as we sang, "*I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not.*" Then like David and the unnamed woman, we cry out. "*Lord, forgive the wrong I have done;*" and forgiveness comes. As simply and directly as David had made his confession, Nathan proclaims the absolution, "*The LORD for His part has forgiven your sin.*" To the unnamed woman in Luke's gospel,

Jesus demonstrates His power to participate in the divine forgiving of sins by simply proclaiming, *“Your sins are forgiven...go in peace.”*

This pattern of recognizing sin, seeking pardon, and receiving forgiveness is very familiar to us; we repeat it at every Mass. We begin Mass by confessing to our brothers and sisters that we are sinners, and then we receive our forgiveness. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul provides us with a reason why we should bother to examine our lives for sin, *“I have been crucified with Christ...”* he wrote *“...no longer I, but Christ lives in me.”* Paul is not saying that when we accept Christ we simply choose to live by a new standard and a new set of morals; what he is saying is through Christ living within us, we are reshaped anew from the inside - out. Where Christ dwells, sin and darkness cannot exist. We live as an entirely new creation in which sin is incompatible.

Fortunately there is a remedy for us that will root sin out of our lives, and all we have to do to receive this healing of our souls is to stand in line. Lines are very familiar to us; grocery lines, gas lines, lines to get into movies or concerts or sporting events. This particular line meets every Saturday at 4pm in the Cathedral vestibule. It is a line comprised entirely of sinners waiting their turn to confess their sins, and hear those wonderful words proclaimed by Christ through the ministry of His priests, *“Your sins are forgiven, go in peace.”* It’s a healing line where hearts can be set right and focused on God; where gratitude for our redemption flows in a sincere outpouring of love; and where our sinful natures are burned away by the fire of Christ living within us. With a clean heart and a renewed spirit we can then join the unnamed woman at the table with Jesus; nourished by His body and blood we can truly say, *“Christ lives in me!”*