

Greetings to you! Our theme for this morning's meditation is "The compassionate love of God gives confidence to his children." In the gospel reading from St. Luke we see that one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him. Jesus went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

Luke narrates for us that as Jesus had sat down a woman in the town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house and came with an alabaster jar of perfume. The woman who enters is told to be a person who lived a sinful life. She might have gained this reputation because she is a prostitute. As soon as she comes in she stood behind Jesus near his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. Her gifts are an expression of devotion in a sacrament of thanksgiving. The anointing of his feet is clearly intentional because she has come prepared. Her washing of his feet is not premeditated because she has nothing with which to dry them and is obliged to use her hair. The woman's coming requires great courage. Jesus' teaching has caused her to think about spiritual matters as her tears indicate. Luke describes the woman's actions in great detail. Every meticulous move that she makes is presented to us. But alongside the care that she put to anoint Jesus is the note of emotion that accompanies her actions. Both humility and devotion are found in her emotions.

This woman has heard Jesus proclaim the freely offered love of God for sinners. This good news of God's love for sinners, even those like her has overwhelmed her and triggered in her a deep desire to offer a grateful response. One commentator says that "A flask with this perfume was worn by women around the neck and hung down below the breast. Such a flask was used both to sweeten the breath and perfume the person. It doesn't take much imagination to understand how important such a flask would be for a prostitute." Her intent is to pour it out on his feet because she does not need it any longer. The woman's mood reveals emotional devotion which is motivated by love and fueled by the gracious message that Jesus gave to sinners. These sinners have responded in humility and repentance to God (Luke 7:47). Her action received much attention.

The host Simon is disturbed by the proceedings and begins to doubt Jesus' credentials. He said to himself, "If this man were a prophet he would know who was touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner." In Simon's thinking Jesus is not a prophet because he let the sinner get too close. The word "touching" pictures an ongoing contact with Jesus which offends the Pharisee. It may be that the issue of her as a sinner and thus defiling Jesus by her touch. Moreover loosening her hair and wiping Jesus' feet with it was an intimate gesture that a woman was expected to enact only in the presence of her husband. The loosening of her hair before Simon and her guests would have shocked all those who were in the room.

Jesus then turns towards the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your home. You didn't give water to wash my feet but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered would not stop kissing, I entered your house and you did not put oil on my head but she poured perfume on my feet. Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven— as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." Simon who had to extend hospitality as a host had to wash the feet of the guest, kiss him as he entered on both cheeks and anoint him on the head. This was completely missed out. On the other hand this sinful woman had recognized Jesus' love for sinners and responds in humility and repentance. It is her love for Jesus that makes her pour out the perfume on Jesus' feet, wipes it with her hair and keeps on kissing it.

While all three acts were not done by the Pharisee these were fulfilled by the sinful woman; because the woman was forgiven much she loves much; her love is demonstrated by her action so that a great love reflects the presence of great forgiveness. The forgiveness is not a result of the acts but rather testifying to the presence of love in gratitude for the granting of forgiveness. Jesus then tells her "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus knew who the woman was. Simon thinks that he is righteous and needs no forgiveness. Jesus' point is that the woman is much closer to God's grace than Simon. Simon still does not recognize that he too needs the forgiveness of Christ. God had initiated the transformation in this woman's life. The people who gathered around were questioning Jesus saying "Who is this who even forgives sinners?" Jesus reassures the woman saying that her faith has saved her. The woman stands accepted before God. She is asked to depart with God's blessings as Jesus ask her to go in peace.

The compassionate love of God continues to extend to all sinners. God deeply desires that each one of us repents of our sinful ways and responds to his great love. The sinful woman was fully aware of the sinfulness and sought Jesus who offered her the forgiveness of sins and a chance to live a transformed life. Simon the Pharisee on the other hand was a self-righteous man who did not see the need for repentance and looked down as contempt on others. May we this Lenten season truly repent of our sins and accept the compassionate love of God.