

I Am Sorry

C11Ord

The poet Alexander Pope once wrote:
“To err is human, to forgive divine.”

How appropriate those words were
for a newly appointed deacon who was visiting
his friend Bob in the hospital.

Bob was unable to speak because of the oxygen mask.
IV tubes and hoses ran everywhere,
hooked to beeping monitors.

The deacon stepped close to the bed
and smiled down at his friend who suddenly
motioned frantically for something to write with.

The deacon handed him pen and paper,
and with his last bit of energy
Bob scribbled a note, then died.

In the confusion that ensued,
the deacon put the note in his coat pocket.

Two days later, at the wake service,
the deacon was finishing his eulogy
when he remembered the note.

“Bob handed me this note just before he died,”
the deacon said.

“Knowing Bob, I’m sure his last words will inspire us all.”
Opening the note, he read,
“You’re standing on my oxygen tube!”

“To err is human, to forgive divine.”

Sunday's Gospel is one that we can likely find ourselves in. The woman who

- bows down before Jesus
- and cleanses his feet with her tears,
- and anoints them with precious ointment,

is someone that most of us can relate to.

For she was a person, broken by her own sinfulness
She was a person in need of forgiveness.

How often has any one of us been in a situation in need of forgiveness? Far too often.

Anyone with a conscience knows what it is like to come to the realization that we have blown it.

- That we've followed the rules – but missed their message.
- That we've been right too often and loved too little.
- That we've squandered our gifts, our health, our relationships.

And so, we can have a lot of empathy toward the woman in Sunday's Gospel for we know what it is like to be her.

There is a multitude of stories from people like the woman in the Gospel who made a decision to turn her will and her life over to the care of God.

If you are familiar with 12 Step Programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, you'll recognize what the woman in today's gospel experienced as Step 3.

First, she admitted that she was powerless over her sinfulness and that her life had become unmanageable.

Second, she came to believe that a Power greater than herself could restore her to sanity.

Third, she made a decision to turn her will and her life over to the care of God as she understood Him – the person of Jesus.

Over the years, I've been privileged to hear the stories of some friends who are in Alcoholics Anonymous.

In following the 12 steps, they have lived out in their own lives the actions of the woman in Sunday's Gospel.

1. They admitted that their powerless over alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, sex . . .the list goes on and that their lives had become unmanageable.
2. They came to understand and believe that only a Power greater than themselves could restore their to sanity.
3. They made a decision to turn their will and their life over to the care of God as they understood Him – for many, this very personal savior is Jesus Christ.

The stories of folks involved in A.A. are as challenging and inspiring as Sunday's Gospel, and they are happening quietly all around us everyday.

For over 70 years, the A.A. Fellowship started by an alcoholic Roman Catholic named Bill W. has encouraged people to tell their story, and claim spiritual progress.

Many AA and NA fellowships meet in churches and church halls – including our own.

Few, I know however, feel comfortable sitting with us in these pews on Sunday morning.

It is our loss – for their stories
are stories of redemption and salvation
that we need to hear, lest we unwittingly
become like Simon the Pharisee in today’s Gospel
holy on the outside – but broken within.

Unlike the woman who washed Jesus feet with her tears
Simon invited Jesus into his home but not into his heart.

His judgmental attitude toward both his house-guest Jesus
and the woman who courageously came to him
in her brokenness - attested to his unwillingness

- to even recognize his own brokenness,
- acknowledge his guilt, and
- accept his own powerlessness over sin.

And because he didn’t see the need for forgiveness
Simon missed the opportunity to experience
the forgiveness and healing that Jesus was ready to offer.

Today’s gospel features two sinners and Jesus whose very
presence invites truthfulness and promises forgiveness.

One sinner is open in acknowledging her need and her guilt.
Without speaking the words, “I am sorry,”
her tears attest to her sorrow for having fallen short
of who she has been called to be by God.

Simon, the other sinner it would seem - has chosen to remain in
his sin. “I am sorry” remains unspoken.

The contrasting experiences, of Simon and the unnamed woman,
along with that of David in our first reading
call upon each one here to decide which words we shall speak
and which path we shall choose.

If that point from this week’s scripture
is not now abundantly clear . . . all I can say is . . . I’m sorry.