

There is a great difference between knowing that we've done something wrong and truly understanding what it means to be forgiven. We can admit our sins, say that we are sorry, go to Confession, and then move on. But sometimes we can become so accustomed to God's mercy that we no longer appreciate how extraordinary it is. We know *that* God forgives us, but we no longer *wonder at the fact* that He forgives us.

That is the heart of today's Gospel. The woman who comes to Jesus knows that she is a sinner. She does not come pretending to be respectable or trying to prove that she deserves His attention. She comes with humility, sorrow, and love. The Pharisee, on the other hand, seems to have little awareness of his own need for mercy. He is much more conscious of the woman's sins than of his own need for God.

Jesus shows us something very important: the person who recognizes how much he has been forgiven will also learn to love more deeply. Gratitude for mercy produces love. But when we begin to think that we have little need for forgiveness, our hearts become harder. We

become less patient with the sins of others because we have forgotten our own dependence upon God's mercy.

St. Paul gives us the foundation for this in the first reading. He reminds the Corinthians that the Gospel is not simply a collection of teachings or moral principles. At the very center of our faith is the reality that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead. Everything begins there. Christianity is not primarily about becoming good enough to deserve God. It is about receiving the grace that God has already offered us through Jesus Christ and allowing that grace to transform our lives.

Paul himself understood this personally. He had persecuted the Church. He considered himself unworthy to be called an apostle. Yet the grace of God was not wasted on him. Christ took a man who had been fighting against the Church and made him one of its greatest apostles. Paul did not respond to that grace by saying that his past no longer mattered. He responded by giving his entire life to Christ.

That is the proper response to mercy. We do not receive forgiveness so that we can remain the same. We receive forgiveness so that we can become new.

This is where the Gospel becomes a serious challenge for us. It is possible to come to Mass every Sunday and still become like the Pharisee. We can become accustomed to the things of God. We can hear the readings, receive Holy Communion, go to Confession when necessary, and still lose our sense of wonder at what Christ has done for us. We must never allow that to happen.

The Eucharist is not a reward for people who have managed to live perfect lives. It is the sacramental gift of Christ to His people who know that they need Him. The confessional is not a place of humiliation for people who have failed to be perfect. It is the place where the sinner encounters the mercy of Christ. And the Cross is not merely an object of Christian decoration. It is the place where we see the terrible seriousness of sin and, at the same time, the unimaginable depth of God's love.

So today we should ask for the grace to see ourselves truthfully.

Not better than we are, and not worse than we are. We are sinners who have been loved by God. We are people who have failed and yet have been offered mercy. We are weak, but we have been given grace. And because God has been merciful to us, we must become merciful toward others.

That means refusing to hold someone's past permanently against them. It means being patient with the weaknesses of others. It means forgiving offenses instead of continually bringing them back into the conversation. It means going to Confession honestly and regularly, rather than allowing sin to become something we simply learn to live with.

The woman in the Gospel leaves Jesus changed because she encounters mercy and responds with love. St. Paul spends the rest of his life proclaiming the grace that had transformed him. The same grace is offered to us.

Let us not become so familiar with God's mercy that we cease to be grateful for it. Let us remember what Christ has done for us, return to Him when we fall, and allow His forgiveness to make us more humble, more grateful, and more generous in our love for others. For the Christian who truly knows that he has been forgiven cannot remain unchanged. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!