

**June 12, 2016 The Sinful Woman and Mercy Homily:** Brothers and sisters, a highly respected and learned rabbi, a teacher of the Jewish faith, gathered around himself a group of his young disciples. In the course of a lecture on the holiness of the Almighty, the rabbi asked a question. "Is there any place where God does not dwell?" In unison, the young men replied: "Surely not!" The bemused rabbi corrected them: "But you are wrong. Wherever sin is, God is absent. Holiness and sin can never co-exist. God does not love sinners. The Lord distances himself from sinners. Just as oil and water do not mix, so God and the sinner can never be seen together." Is that true?

Such, also, is the view of a strictly practicing Jew in today's gospel, a Pharisee named Simon. Simon is indignant when a public sinner, an unnamed woman and perfect stranger, enters his home without the necessary permission. Her presence has filled his home with the taint of scandal. It is implied that the host of the party was aware of the nature of the woman's sins. In addition, he is scandalized by the behavior of his honored guest, Jesus. In his view, a righteous man like the teacher from Nazareth would never allow a sinful person to touch him. Simon is a harsh judge of human weakness. His thoughts, unmasked by Our Lord, are telling. "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of a woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner" (Lk.7:39). She is an unclean woman who has brought shame, disgrace and dishonor to his home. However, Jesus sees the woman as wounded and in need of healing and mercy. He sees in her a worthy candidate for a personal make-over, a radical transformation!

In the justly acclaimed musical, *Man of La Mancha*, the hero, Don Quixote befriends a prostitute named Aldonza, The woman considers herself a failure and beneath contempt. She is a social pariah. The man of LaMancha gives her a new vision of herself by re-naming her "Dulcinea" and singing to her that her name "is like a prayer an angel whispers!"

It is interesting to note that the righteous Pharisee who is quick to condemn another person is, himself, not without fault. St. Luke informs us that he violated all the rules of hospitality by failing to provide his honored guest water for cleansing, a kiss of greeting and oil for anointing. Perhaps one of the most important lessons we can derive from today's gospel is that the possibility of redemption exists for all sinners. A sinner can be transformed into a saint. A radical re-making of the whole person is made possible by Christ!

A story: One day Abba Isaac went to a monastery. He saw a brother committing sin and he condemned him. When he returned to the desert, an angel of the Lord came and stood in front of the door of his cell and said, "I will not let you enter." But Isaac persisted, saying "What's the matter?" and the angel replied, "God has sent me to ask you where you want to throw the guilty brother whom you have condemned." Immediately, Isaac repented and said. "I have sinned. Please forgive me." Then the angel said, "Get up, God has forgiven you. But from now on, be careful not to judge someone before God has done so".

Are we too quick to condemn others? Do we pray for their conversion?

While I was on my back after receiving treatment a few years ago, I received a phone call from the parish receptionist. She informed me that a member of the parish council had taken his own life. I committed myself to celebrate his funeral Mass. The Mass drew a sizable crowd, especially members of the local legal community. Some weeks after the funeral, I encountered a

parishioner who was present at the funeral. Out of curiosity, he asked me a question “Did you see all the strippers at the funeral Mass?” “No”, I replied.

“But surely you must have seen how many of them were dressed. They were all friends of the deceased who faithfully attended the strip club and who was very generous to the young ladies. What do you have to say?” My reply, “God bless them for their kindness and loyalty to a fallen friend!”

Though they may have been inappropriately dressed, their hearts were certainly in the right place the day of the funeral! Let the Good Lord be the one to Judge them. I suspect He was pleased with them as well.

Amen!