

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time – C – 2019
Sir. 35. 15- 17, 20-22//2 Tim.4.6-8,16-18//Luke 18.9-14

→a story told about a young woman who died and went to heaven

→her life on earth had not been good....if fact it had been quite bad!

→and so when she arrived at the gates of heaven, she was told that she could be admitted only under one condition.....she must return to earth and bring back the gift that God values above all other gifts

→and so the young woman returned to earth, and there she thought and thought about what gift God values above all other gifts

→[and then] one day she came upon a young man who had just died for his faith in God... and she thought, “this is indeed the gift that God values the most: -- the blood of someone who has died for his faith.”

→so she took a drop of the young man’s blood and brought it back to heaven.

→but when she presented it, she was told that there was something else that God valued even more than this

→so she returned to earth again and thought about what God would value even more than the blood of someone who has died for their faith.

→then she came upon a missionary preaching God’s word among the poor and she thought, “surely, this is indeed the gift God would value the most: the sweat from the brow of someone who has spent their life preaching the good news to the poor.

→but when she presented this gift in heaven, she was told once again that there was something that God valued even more highly than this

→so she returned to earth once more and thought....what could it be....what gift would God value even more highly than the sweat of someone who has spent their life preaching and teaching the people about Jesus.

→time and time again, she went back to heaven with precious gifts...but each time she was told that there was still something else that God values even more highly

→finally, one day, when she was about to give up, she came upon a child playing at a fountain...the child's face was beautiful and innocent

...and at that moment...a man rode up on horseback to get a drink from the fountain.....when the man saw the child....he began to recall his own childhood,...the innocence he once had...but when he looked into the fountain and saw his reflection ...he noticed that it --was ugly and hard, it had wrinkles of anger and bitterness...his brow was worn from many years of deceit and dishonesty, his cheeks were hollow...a result of the many grudges he held for his entire life

→and as he stared at his image....he suddenly realized how he had wasted away his life that God had given

→at that moment...tears of sorrow and repentance welled up in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks, falling into the fountain...in sorrow for how he had lived

→the woman took one of the man's tears thinking this might be it

→upon returning to heaven...this time...there was great joy among the angels and saints.....

→for you see...this was...the gift that God valued above all others...the tears of a repentant sinner.

PAUSE

→when I came across that story...I thought how appropriate it was for today's gospel reading...because...the prayer that was valued the most by God was the prayer of the repentant sinner.

→today's gospel story is about a Pharisee and a tax collector

→now the Pharisee, sets himself apart from everyone else...and sanctimoniously shows his arrogance and pride

→he proclaims that he is better than and above everyone else, and not in need of God's mercy...

→then we hear about the humble tax collector...he knows he is a sinner, much like all of us...and in humility he asks for God's mercy...

“O God...be merciful to me a sinner”

→and so in a word...our lesson today is about...true, authentic, and sincere repentance

PAUSE

→repentance has been described.... “as being sorry enough to want to quit whatever we have been doing wrong” (REPEAT!)

→but I would suggest that repentance goes beyond that

→because you see.....it's not only about being sorry enough to want to quit whatever we have been doing wrong....it's also about being sorry enough to make up for all the wrong that we have done

→being sorry enough to make amends, correct and heal ourselves of the wrong we have committed

PAUSE

→none of us live a perfect life....

→we have our faults and disappointments

→our attitudes and rough edges

→we get mad, we get even, --- we gossip, hold grudges, and often allow bitterness to get the best of us

→but there is also part of us that knows when we have done something wrong...when we need to say I'm sorry and we when we need to try to be better...

→someone once said to me...that they wished life was like a notebook where we could tear out the parts where we've made mistakes and throw them away

→and the more I thought about it...the more that image makes sense ...because...when you think about it, thanks to Christ and his coming on this earth....

thanks to his death on the cross...---and to his loving us unconditionally

→he has bestowed his forgiveness to us...the same forgiveness that hopefully we will bestow and share with each other [as well]

PAUSE

→in a certain sense....thanks to Christ's presence in our lives and world...life IS like a notebook...we can tear out the parts where we've made mistakes

and throw them away....by saying, "I'm sorry," [by saying] "have mercy on me for I am a sinner,"

→we can seek repentance and forgiveness....and....more importantly we can share that forgiveness with those who ask it from us

→and that is the message of today's gospel story....

→we are truly forgiven by God when we seek, embrace and accept repentance in our lives....

→when that happens it means that we are serious about changing the way we live

→perhaps [then] the real problem todayis that.... these days we rarely think about....let alone.....seek and embrace repentance in our lives

PAUSE

→yet the good news we hear todaytells us that we have been given the gift of repentance

→that even though we do things that are wrong....we have the capacity, potential and the power to repent

→to let go of the anger and bitterness, the grudges and hurt we harbor against one another

→to let go of the pettiness, and selfishness we sometimes have....

→to let go of all the things that bring us down

→AND....to change our ways...to look into the fountain of water...just like the old man in our story and realize

→that the gift God values the most...are the tears, the soul and the heart of a repentant sinner.