

**..HER SINS , WHICH ARE MANY, ARE FORGIVEN – FOR SHE LOVED MUCH - Biblical  
Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Luke 7,36-8,36**

*One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."*

*"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

*Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.*

Only in Luke's gospel do we find this shocking episode, sometimes scandalous. It is the only time that Jesus encounters a prostitute.

It is Luke's gospel, chapter 7 from verse 36. Let's read.

*"One of the Pharisees.."* We know who they are. The evangelist in this narration presents them as people on their merits, for their holiness of life they were considered closer to God. Pharisee means separate, he who through the observation of the rules and commandments is set apart from mankind to be closer to God. Therefore the person nearer to God that we see, actually seems more distant.

*"One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table."* Why the Pharisee, known rival and hostile to Jesus, invites him to eat with him? Probably to publically distance himself, to make an affront to this Jesus. Why is this? Because the Pharisee does none of the welcoming gestures that are for a special guest towards Jesus.

The evangelist now presents a surprise.

*"And behold..."* an expression indicating something unexpected, also because in that culture meals were only for men. Women were not seen in the meals, they were in the kitchen and neither did they serve at table, but made the sons serve. Therefore it is a dinner for men only, but not only. They are Pharisees, persons observant of the idea of purity, of observing the rules that permit them to be closer to God.

*"And behold, a woman..."* and the evangelist confirms that she is *"..a sinner"*. So a prostitute *"..of the city, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house.."* And here the evangelist presents a disturbing scene because this woman is not only a woman, but for the most pure being a sinner, breaks into the room of the banquet, entering shamelessly with tools of the trade.

*"..brought an alabaster flask of ointment,"* Ointment with which to anoint her clients.

But not only. *"..standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears..."* The woman, as we see in all of this narration, expresses her overwhelming gratitude for a forgiveness that she already feels to have had from Jesus that in his preaching had spoken of a Father that is charitable to the ungrateful and the wicked.

And the surprises are not finished. The evangelist writes, *"..and wiped them with the hair of her head.."* unheard of, as from the moment of puberty and for all the life the hair must not be seen publically, hair was seen only at home with the husband and children, but never outside. It was actually an occasion for divorce if a woman dared to be seen unveiled. Flowing hair was a weapon of great erotic content. Holophernes, the enemy of the Israeli population, knows something about this, when he welcomed Judith, this heroin of the Israeli people, how did she seduce him? Letting down her hair. And poor Holophernes, lost his head in all senses.

So it is scene high erotic content. But it is not finished, the evangelist continues, “.. *kissed his feet*” With that mouth that woman, this prostitute kissed Jesus’ feet, “..*and anointed them with the ointment.*” It is too much, therefore the Pharisee, the pious person who observes all rules, explodes.

“*Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself,*” the expression is full of contempt; “*If this man were a prophet,*” He avoids to call Jesus by name, he treats him with contempt. “*If this man were a prophet,*” He certainly does not seem a prophet. The evangelist just before had said in verse 34 of this chapter that Jesus “..*has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’*” (Luke 7,34), Here is the proof, other than a prophet!

“..*he would have known who ..*” note the contempt, “..*and what sort of woman this is who is touching him,*” Here the evangelist uses the verb “to touch” indicated for sexual relationships. So the Pharisee or the pious person sees it as a temptation to the sinful action of this woman. He says in fact “..*she is a sinner.*”

And here is Jesus’ reaction. Jesus calls him by name. The Pharisee did not call Jesus with his name, but he does and he proposes a short story, a short parable. And the Pharisee, who had expressed this contempt towards Jesus addresses him with hypocrisy: “*Say it, Teacher.*” Jesus tells this short parable of a moneylender and two debtors. “*One owed five hundred denari,*” Denari was the daily pay for a worker, so it was nearly two years of work. “..*and the other fifty.*” Almost two months work. “*When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?*” The answer is clear. One must give nearly two years of work, the other just two months, the reply is very clear.

The Pharisee responds reluctantly using the verb “to suppose”. How do you assume? It is clear that he will love the one for whom he cancelled the larger debt. “*The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.*” And he said to him, “*You have judged rightly.*”

Now Jesus turns to reproach the Pharisee who has invited to dinner but had not welcomed him. He has not shown any gesture of welcoming that was shown for a guest. He, the person close to God, had failed in respect towards Jesus. The woman, as woman and sinner the farthest from God, had in fact expressed these gestures. So Jesus here presents three gestures of hospitality: water to drink, a gesture of hospitality, a kiss that is a sign of welcome and anointment that was a sign of honour.

None of these gestures was made by the Pharisee towards Jesus, unlike the woman who has done them abundantly. And here Jesus says: “*Therefore I tell you her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.*”

What is it that Jesus wants to say? Both Simon and the woman have already been forgiven, But only the woman is conscious of this love and expresses it in an uncontrollable manner. Then Jesus turns to the woman: “*Your sins are forgiven.*” Jesus does not forgive the woman at that moment, but confirms that her sinful past is forgiven. Naturally a scandal is born between the guests who again do not call him by name, but in an insulting way, ask “*Who is this, who even forgives sins?*”

Because only God can forgive sins. And here is the sensational statement of Jesus: that which in the eyes of religion was a sacrilege, an impure woman had touched a man – a distance of at least two meters must be kept from this woman – to the eyes of Jesus it is an act of faith. “ *And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*”

So that which in the eyes of the religion was a sacrilege in the eyes of Jesus was an act of faith. It is not a punishment, or a reprimand, but a blessing. Scandalized by the fact that Jesus does not ask the woman – as he had done with the adulterer – “Go and sin no more”

But what happened to this woman? Maybe the evangelist gives us an indication continuing, speaking of Jesus that goes to villages and cities, and with him, unheard of for that time, there is also a small group of women. There is no reason why this woman, this sinner, had not joined the group of Jesus’ disciples.