

## 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time C “Remedy for the Remnants of Sin”

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Let's begin with a little parable I like...

There was once a little boy with a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, to hammer a nail in the back fence. The first day the boy had driven 40 nails into that fence. Then it gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done really well, my son, but let's take a look at all the holes in the fence. The nails are gone and your soul is better for it, the fence is sure better for it. We can repaint the fence, cover what we can, but we will always know there will still be holes, won't we?" The moral of the story is: We can be forgiven of our wrongdoing, but sometimes holes remain.

I like that story because it helps me appreciate the first reading from Second Samuel. King David did a terrible thing. He sinned egregiously by setting up a man to die so he could steal his wife. It was just awful. The Lord rebukes David and informs him that calamity will fall upon his house because of his terrible sin. David repents of his sins and asks for forgiveness. And, God forgives David. God doesn't kill David. God however makes David live with the consequences of his mistake. And the consequences were dire. He was forgiven however a significant hole remained in David's life as the story continues in Second Samuel.

In the Gospel reading, the woman who was anointing Jesus' feet had a lot of hurts in her soul. The Lord forgives her many sins. Her action of anointing Jesus' feet with oil and crying in the process also suggests the activity of preparing a body for burial. Jesus forgives her sins. The nails are taken out of her soul, so to speak, but some big holes remained however. The cost of her forgiveness would be the death of the Lord.

My friends, the readings this weekend challenge us to pinpoint the nails that we have pounded into our fence through sinful thoughts, words and actions. The Church recognizes that there have only been two people in the history of the world born without sin and you and I ain't them, so we are all invited to join the woman at the feet of the Lord to seek forgiveness so to get those nails out of our hearts. Humanity, as a whole it seems, is wounded by our violent nature, as we tragically saw again in Orlando last night. Our hearts are moved in prayer and support for those impacted by the evil at work in our world.

This world is not an easy place to live in at times, however, my family had reason to celebrate yesterday. This is because my family is joyfully celebrating my parent's fiftieth wedding anniversary this weekend. Over a meal last week, they talked about their secret to being married so long. Their answers to this were faith in God, laugh a lot, love a lot and forgive a lot, over and over and over again. And so, perhaps the readings this weekend are appropriate after all! Essential to marriage is the art of forgiving and to the ability to be forgiven. Good advice!

And I find it funny that people sometimes give Catholics a bad rap for talking about guilt. Of course, I take a different approach. I think the Catholic Church is just honest about the human condition. You don't need to be Catholic to experience guilt. My take is, Catholicism offers us hope and a way out of guilt.

We have sacraments given to us by Christ to get those nails out of our hearts. For those who have not yet been baptized, the sacrament to receive of course is baptism. Baptism washes us clean and is the doorway to a relationship with Jesus. For those of us who are baptized and have fallen into sin, Jesus has given us the sacrament of reconciliation. It is a powerful sacrament. If it has been awhile since you have experienced this sacrament, let a priest know. We are here to serve.

However, after we have been forgiven, what do we do with the holes that remain? We all know that I could have hurt someone and received absolution for this in the sacrament, and God will forgive, the nail will be pulled out. But sometimes, there will be a hole left over. I will experience that wound the next time I see the person I hurt when it is time for me to apologize.

What does the Church call the holes in the fence that remain after the nails are pulled out? The Church calls these holes the remnants of sin. Think of it as Catholic Karma. How do we fill these holes, these remnants of sin? In a word, we fill these holes through holiness (I bet you saw that coming). We can fill these holes through prayer each day, through spiritual reading, by practicing random acts of kindness, taking better care of ourselves and perhaps even consider a pilgrimage at some point in the future, like prayerfully walking through the Holy Doors during this year of Mercy like at the Cathedral in Seattle. In fact, a large group of parishioners, family and friends will be joining me in walking through the Holy Doors of Rome this September as part of our pilgrimage for Mother Teresa's canonization. My friends, the more we incorporate the holy into our lives the holier we will become. Like the woman in our Gospel reading, with Christ in our lives, we become whole again.

I believe it is also important to recognize that when the Risen Lord appears to the Apostles, he appears with the wounds from his crucifixion, didn't he? Nails were pounded into his hands, in death the nails were removed, in the resurrection the wounds were still there, however, they no longer hurt. On the contrary, the Risen Lord's wounds have the power to heal. As Isaiah prophesied, "by his wounds we are healed."

And so, it seems to me, once we rise with Christ, we may still have holes in our souls, but as we grow in holiness, these wounds no longer have to hurt. These wounds can in fact be a source of strength with the power to heal others. And we see this with people in our lives; people who, because they have suffered, are now able to help other people through their suffering. It was what I think St. Paul was getting at in the second reading "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" We can't earn this grace, grace by definition is free. It is our participation with this grace that requires work.

And so, in the spirit of our second reading from St. Paul, one more story I like...

A man dies and goes to heaven. Of course, St. Peter meets him at the pearly gates. St. Peter says, "Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in."

"Okay," the man says, "I was married to the same woman my whole life and was faithful to her and my family."

"That's wonderful," says St. Peter, "that's worth three points!"

"Only three points?" he says. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my time, talent and treasure."

"Terrific!" says St. Peter, "that's certainly worth a point."

"One point? Golly. How about this: I started a soup kitchen in my city and supported shelters that help the homeless."

"Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says.

"TWO POINTS!!" the man cries, "At this rate the only way I get into heaven is by the grace of God!"

To which St. Peter replied, "Come on in!"