

Brothers and Sisters,

After having just heard this Gospel passage, I'd like to pose this question to you: How do you receive Jesus into your life?

I think this is an important question for reflection, especially as we prepare to receive Him truly present in the Eucharist. And I don't mean to ask this question rhetorically. I am asking you to give some serious thought and reflection on how you receive Jesus. Do you receive him like the sinful woman, who comes with the alabaster jar filled with perfume, and gives Him all the hospitality she can afford, or do you, like Simon the Pharisee, receive Him nonchalantly, ignoring hospitality?

I think this is an important question to ask ourselves. We just received Jesus in the Word. Ask yourself is you were paying attention, or were you day dreaming, or perhaps even reading the bulletin? Did you participate in the Psalm by singing along with our choir?

How do you receive him in the Eucharist? Do you simply get up and go through the communion line, or have you prepared yourself to offer Him hospitality as you welcome him into your very own body?

I ask these questions because today we heard two different ways that people receive Jesus. Simon was a Pharisee. He was an educated man, and as such, we can expect he knew the customs regarding hospitality, and especially how to welcome an honored guest. And yet, he seems to ignore all these rules of hospitality. He receives Jesus into his house, but he does so in a rather blasé manner. As if Jesus were any old person visiting him.

If your boss, or a political dignitary or someone important to us were coming to visit our home, we all know that there are certain customary things we would do to show hospitality. Most of us would clean our houses, to make them presentable. Most of us would prepare some food and drink to offer our guest. We would put on nice clothes, and take care of little details so that our guest would feel welcomed, and respected.

In our Gospel reading today Simon fails to do this. He doesn't offer Jesus any of the customary hospitality. The sinful woman, however, does just the opposite. She's able to recognize Jesus as someone to be honored, to be welcomed as a revered guest. And she immediately offers her hospitality. She bathes His feet and kisses them, she anoints Him. These are all ways of loving and welcoming Jesus.

Friends, I don't think it will come as a surprise that I suggest that the sinful woman is the one whose example we are to follow. Hers is the example of someone who is prepared to welcome Jesus. We are to be similarly prepared.

This woman knows she is unworthy to receive Jesus. Well, friends, we're no different. We're all sinners, just like this woman, and just like Simon the Pharisee. This is why at every Mass, before we receive the Eucharist, we say the words, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed." These words aren't something that we recite from memory with little thought. No, they're the admission of a profound reality – we are all sinners, and none of us are worthy to have God enter into our own house, none of us are worthy to receive God.

If you are like me, so often I tend to overlook this fact. I think that our culture of relativity tends to influence us too much when considering our own sinfulness. So

often it's easy to say, yeah, okay, I'm a sinner, but at least I'm not as bad of a sinner as my neighbors, I mean, have you seen the sins they commit?

But what Jesus tells us in a parable today is that our ability to love is directly related to the amount that we have been forgiven. The person who had the debt of 500 denari forgiven will love more. Now, I don't think that Jesus is suggesting we go out and commit grave sin so that we can be forgiven all the more. But I do think that Jesus is asking us to take a hard look at our dependency on God and His mercy. The challenge is for us to stop focusing on ourselves relative to others, but to come to an understanding as to how much we need to be forgiven.

I was on a retreat with my brother priests this past week at Notre Dame retreat center in Canandaigua. Bishop Zubic from Pittsburgh was our retreat master, and over the course of the weekend he constantly asked us to look at our wounds, our sinfulness, as well as the many graces we have received in our lives. In doing this, I came to a powerful realization – one of those realizations that tend to only happen on retreats when we focus so intently on God – and I realized in a powerful way the many blessings God has given me, but more importantly my own sinfulness, and how deeply I needed to be forgiven. I asked the bishop to hear my confession, which took nearly an hour, and in that process, I think I came to understand Jesus' words that "the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little."

Friends, when we take the time to truly reflect upon our own lives, on the gifts that God has given us, both in blessings and in forgiveness, what we learn is that no matter who we are, our indebtedness to God is closer to 500 denari than it is to 50 denari. In light of this reality, our only response to God can be that of love. There is no way we can repay our debt to God, the only thing we can do in the face of having such a debt wiped away is to respond with love.

This is what the woman did. She recognized her great debt, and responded out of love. She responded by offering Jesus hospitality, by using her tears to wash His feet, by anointing Him with oil, by kissing his feet. Simon failed to do this. He too had just a great a debt to God. Simon, like the woman, owed everything he had to God, but his failure to recognize this prevented him from loving much.

So friends, let's go back to our original question: how do you receive Jesus? At Mass do you receive Him with reverence and awe. Or do you nonchalantly receive communion and then leave Mass early so you can get to breakfast, or beat the traffic in the parking lot? At work do you recognize that your skills are a gift from God? Does that motivate you to help a less talented co-worker, or do you opt instead to gossip about co-workers who are less talented? Do you recognize your material goods as gifts God has shared with you? Does that lead you to share with others, especially the poor, or do you cringe and walk away when someone begs you for money? Do you recognize your own sinfulness, and your need to be forgiven by God, and does that motivate you to show compassion and forgiveness to those who have sinned against you, or do you become self-righteous, merely pointing out the sins of others without considering your own sins? Do you love with a love that comes from having been forgiven a debt of 500 denari, or have you, like Simon, been blinded into seeing your debt as a mere 50 denari?