



Thursday 16th September 2021
24th WK ORDINARY TIME – YR 1
Saints Cornelius, Pope, and Cyprian, Bishop, Martyrs

First Reading

1 Tm 4:12-16

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to Timothy

Take care about what you do and teach; in this way you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

Do not let people disregard you because you are young, but be an example to all the believers in the way you speak and behave, and in your love, your faith and your purity. Make use of the time until I arrive by reading to the people, preaching and teaching. You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the body of elders laid their hands on you; do not let it lie unused. Think hard about all this, and put it into practice, and everyone will be able to see how you are advancing. Take great care about what you do and what you teach; always do this, and in this way you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 110:7-10. R. v.2

(R.) How great are the works of the Lord!

or

(R.) Alleluia!

1. His works are justice and truth:
his precepts are all of them sure,
standing firm for ever and ever:
they are made in uprightness and truth. (R.)
2. He has sent deliverance to his people
and established his covenant for ever.
Holy his name, to be feared. (R.)
3. To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
all who do so prove themselves wise.
His praise shall last for ever! (R.)

Gospel

Lk 7:36-50

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Her many sins must have been forgiven her, because she loved much.

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal. When he arrived at the Pharisee's house and took his place at table, a woman came in, who had a bad name in the town. She had heard he was dining with the Pharisee and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is that is touching him and what a bad name she has.' Then Jesus took him up and said, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' 'Speak, Master' was the reply. 'There was once a creditor who had two men in his debt; one owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. They were unable to pay, so he pardoned them both. Which of them will love him more?' 'The one who was pardoned more, I suppose' answered Simon. Jesus said, 'You are right.'

Then he turned to the woman. 'Simon,' he said 'you see this woman? I came into your house, and you poured no water over my feet, but she has poured out her tears over my feet and wiped them away with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but she has been covering my feet with kisses ever since I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. For this reason I tell you that her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love. It is the man who is forgiven little who shows little love.' Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' Those who were with him at table began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man, that he even forgives sins?' But he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

Reflection - Fr John Lovell

This Gospel reading of the repentant woman who comes to Jesus in the house of the Pharisee is a clear sign of the differences between the Spirit of God and the spirit of the World.

The spirit of the World, which we so often see and hear expressed in opinion pieces in social media and the news media, is generally anything but kind and merciful. It forms hasty conclusions about people based upon hearsay or first impressions, without looking at the whole person. The world is all too often quick to judge and condemn, while being slow or unwilling to forgive.

Thankfully, the Lord, the only true Judge, is the opposite: He is slow to condemn and is always happy to forgive anyone who acknowledges their mistakes and wants to do better in future.

In standing up for the unpopular person, as He did with the woman in today's Gospel, Jesus risked and ultimately suffered condemnation at the hands of those in power in the society in which He lived. Jesus challenges us to be more like Him, to speak up in defence of the 'underdog', to give people the benefit of the doubt, to write-off no-one, and go beyond popular opinions and find some good in everyone. As with Jesus, for us too this may come at a price.

Today is also the memorial of Saints Cornelius and Cyprian, martyrs and bishops of Rome and Carthage, who were put to death for their Christian witness following the Decian persecution which began in the year 250 AD. Emperor Decius required all people to sacrifice to the gods of Rome or face torture and death. Rather than have their families, including women and children, suffer such a cruel fate, many Christians without abandoning the Lord in their hearts, went through the motions of offering sacrifice to the gods or purchased certificates declaring they had sacrificed to the gods.

Certain rigorists in the Church at that time, including a priest named Novatian, insisted that such people be permanently Excommunicated from the Church, regardless of their repentance. Pope Cornelius and his great supporter Bishop Cyprian, on the other hand, were happy to receive repentant Christians back into full communion with the Church, provided they perform some public penance. They believed Novatian's approach was too harsh and incompatible with the mercy of Christ. This created a temporary split in the Church with many hardliners rebelling against the authority of Pope Cornelius and his supporters, resulting in Novatian set-up as a rival Pope (an Antipope), until his death a few years later.

The heart of God is one of mercy, not condemnation. Jesus understands our human weaknesses, has fully paid the price for our sins and asks us to extend this same mercy to others as He extends it to us.