Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 16, 2013

Jesus asks a critically important question in today’s Gospel. Did you hear it? He asks his host, “Do you see this woman?” Simon apparently hadn’t really seen her. We imagine her as a young and beautiful prostitute. Some even imagine that this is the story of Mary Magdalene. But it’s not. We’re not even given her name. And Luke hardly tells us anything about her. He doesn’t even tell us what her sin was. And even though she was kneeling in plain sight, Simon didn’t “see” her.

Who knows? She may have been old and her hair might have been gray. She may have had crooked teeth or no teeth at all. She may have had wrinkled skin, and eyes filmed over with cataracts. Maybe she wasn’t a “loose” woman at all. Her sin might not have been sexual. It might have been being cruel and calculating and mean. She could have been a thief. She may have abandoned her husband and children altogether.

We’re only told that she lets down her hair and intimately kisses the feet of Jesus. Our imaginations may view this as provocative. But that’s because we don’t know that a woman letting down her hair in public was a sign of grief. In ancient times, women only let their hair down to let everyone know that they were in mourning.

So why do I want you to really see this woman? It’s because if we don’t see her as she really was, we might miss the whole point of Luke’s story. The whole point was that she was in grief over her sins – no matter what those sins may have been. If we’re attracted to her only because we imagine she was beautiful or provocatively intimate – we’ll miss the most important thing about her: that she was in mourning for her sinfulness.

Something, I’m afraid, *we* don’t do enough of. When was the last time I *wept* over my sins? When was the last time I shed even one tear over my lack of charity, my refusal to forgive, my impatience, my gossip? *This* is what Luke’s story is supposed to make us feel. Not that Jesus forgave one more prostitute or one more “sinful” woman. But that this sinful woman was weeping in grief over her sins. And then weeping in joy over being forgiven.

I, for one, think we need to do a little more grieving, and a lot less patting ourselves on the back for not being prostitutes. And there’s not going to be any real *joy* on this planet until more and more of us start weeping over our sins. I promise you: Tears of joy will come – as a wonderful gift from our Savior – but only after we try to really see the nameless, faceless woman in today’s Gospel.

Please God that Lizah Grace (Celson and Ulysses) will also find her in us: in the smiles that crease our faces, in the joy that makes us *look* redeemed, in our love that is a beacon of light for all in downtown Seattle.

Paul A. Magnano

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