

Homily for the Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 12th and 13th, 2010
Cycle C

“Who Needs Your Compassion?”

A few years ago, I came across a story in The Advocate (newspaper) about a young 12 year old boy by the name of Ian O’Gorman. Along with the short article there was a small black and white photo of Ian and all of the other boys in his sixth grade class. The only thing, though, was that all of the boys were completely bald. Ian had been suffering with cancer, and because of his treatment, he had lost all of his hair. One morning, all of the guys in his class showed up with a big surprise for him. The night before, they had all chosen to completely shave their heads. The end product was, when looking at their group photo, you could not tell which one of the boys was Ian. Said one of his friends, “we wanted to do this to help our friend feel better.”

One of the definitions of “compassion” is, “to suffer with someone.”

Who needs your compassion? This day. This week. You can word it any number of ways. “Is there someone in our life to whom we need to be a little more compassionate, kind, and understanding.” Or, to use the words of one 12 year old boy, “who can we help feel better? About their situation in life? About, simply, who they are?”

Jesus, no doubt, was the most compassionate person we’ve ever known. He willingly suffered with anyone: sinners, the sick, the poor, and those who suffered from gossip, judgment, and prejudice. He willingly and knowingly entered into anyone’s suffering, and today’s Gospel scene is no exception. This story is described by many as one of the most important in all of the Gospels. And, while we know the story itself, we may not be aware of the “in-between the lines” aspect of it.

There was a certain Pharisee named Simon who invited Jesus into his home for dinner. Now, at first glance, it seems that he offered this invitation, because he and Jesus were friends. However, it’s possible that there was another reason. Another motive. We’re not 100% sure, but it’s very possible that Simon did not invite Jesus there to befriend him but to belittle him. It was another test. And the others were invited there to watch. Then, another character enters into the room and into the story, the character around whom the majority of this story centers. All we know of her is that she was, “a sinful woman...from the city...with a history...a reputation.” In all seriousness, we can all get what this means. The interesting fact is that she, more than likely, did not just simply show up and enter in there on her own. Some historians speculate that this whole thing was a set-up. “Let’s have this sinful woman of the city streets interact with Jesus. And let’s see what he does.” (Keep in mind that for her to have touched him would have made

him “unclean.”) But, as this part of the story unfolds, so does her approach to Jesus. He did not react as others would have reacted. He simply greeted her with compassion and mercy. It seems that, as soon as she began to realize that forgiveness was hers, the charade was no longer a charade. The Pharisees’ plan was backfiring on them. This sinful woman, scorned by everyone else, told by everyone else (all her life), “you are no good” was greeted by Jesus with the compassionate message of, “God loves you as you are—and so do I.” And that, my friends, was the source of her tears.

This situation was a big risk, for both Jesus and the woman. But guess what. That’s the beautiful thing about this story: both of them knew it, yet they entered into it anyway. They willingly risked “suffering with” each other by allowing love to erase all prejudice.

You and I “suffer with each other” in many ways: illness and loss, when someone is hurt by gossip and prejudice, and we suffer with, are patient with one another through our moments of human weakness, the moments that sometimes, naturally, make us uncomfortable with one another.

But time and time again, God has blessed us with people who have said to us, “God loves you as you are—and so do I.”

For me, nobody has shown me this kind of compassion more than my parents. I remember one time during high school when I had to tell my Dad about something bad I had done. I was reluctant to tell him, because I was afraid. But when I finally told him, his response was simply, “did you really think that, for one moment, I’d stop loving you?”

Compassion: “to suffer patiently with another.”

Who needs it from you?