

The Festival of St. Mary Magdalene, Penitent  
St. Luke 7:36-50  
July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

## Your Sins Are Forgiven

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we give honor to one of the blessed saints of the Bible: St. Mary Magdalene. She is believed to be the sister of Lazarus and Martha of Bethany; she is also believed to be the woman out of whom our Lord cast seven demons; it is also believed that, before her penitence, she was a prostitute. Therefore, today we have as our example—a saint after whom we might model our faith and Christian life—a prostitute who was possessed by seven demons, and who according to the Gospel reading was an outcast by the Church and the religious leaders because she was a sinner. St. Mary Magdalene may not at first glance appear to be a good example for us of the Christian faith, for she is a terrible and manifest sinner.

However, it is precisely because she was such a poor, miserable sinner and was thoroughly troubled by Satan and filled with all sorts of temptations toward sinfulness that she serves as a great model of the faith. For we see in the Gospel reading today a picture of one of the great means of grace that our Lord + Jesus Christ gave to His beloved bride the Church through which the Holy Ghost works to create and sustain faith and life; we see a picture of Confession and Absolution.

Consider this reading from the Evangelist St. Luke! Our Lord has been invited to a *supper*. Upon hearing this our ears of faith are instantly drawn to the holy Altar upon which our Lord's Body and Blood are given to us poor, miserable sinners, so that we might have forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation through the working of the Holy Ghost. When we hear that our Lord is invited to a supper, we immediately think about the one Supper where our Lord gives us His Body to eat, and His Blood to drink in bread and wine.

We are also told by the Evangelist St. Luke that this invitation comes from a Pharisee. Now, we can assume with much certainty that this Pharisee, in addition to inviting our Lord + Jesus, also invited his friends, and that some of these friends would most likely also be of the sect of the Pharisees. What that means is that our Lord is invited to a meal to eat with the religious leaders of His time. It is equally evident that St. Mary Magdalene was *not* invited, for the Pharisee who invited our Lord is the one who thinks to himself that our Lord is acting improperly for allowing this woman to anoint His feet with her tears and perfume.

What we have here is a contrast! We have the Pharisee, a man who has dedicated his life to

understanding the Law of God and to keeping that Law. Now, it would stand to reason that this man did not have the type of sins that would classify him as a sinner in the same manner that St. Mary Magdalene was, for he dedicated his life to avoiding sin and keeping the Law. This woman—St. Mary Magdalene—however, is full of sin, she is tormented by sin and Satan, so much so that the Gospel says that she stood at His feet behind our Lord weeping; she could not even stand to face Him face to face on account of her sins. Her sin was apparently known to everyone—the Pharisee knew, the whole town knew it, even this penitent woman knew it. It would stand to reason that even our Lord + Jesus knew what sort of woman she was.

But there is another contrast that is evident in this text that exists between the Pharisee and the woman, and that is that one possesses contrition, that is, sorrow for one's sins, and one does not; one does not even consider his sin. This woman is full of contrition, she is truly sorry for her sins, therefore she does what every penitent person does, she pours out her soul to the Lord + Jesus. She does not confess her sins with words, but she confesses her sins through her tears and through her anointing of our Lord's feet with fragrant oil. Our Lord, Who knows all things, even what is in her heart, knows that what she is *not* saying with her lips, she *is* saying with her heart, "O Almighty God, Merciful Lord + Jesus, I a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee and justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal punishments, especially do I confess before You, that I have been a prostitute, and that I have not lived a chaste and decent life in word and deed, I have not loved and honored my spouse, for all this I am truly sorry, and I ask You to forgive me all my sin by Your grace." This is the private confession of her heart, through her actions, which she confesses to our Lord + Jesus.

However, the only thing the Pharisee sees is this sinful woman (in his mind) touching our Lord. The woman—being a sinner—cannot be saved (in his mind), therefore, he thinks, why isn't our Lord getting rid of her?

It is here where our Lord tells a parable: two debtors owed money to a creditor; one owed 500 denarii and one owed 50 denarii. The debtors, having no ability within themselves with which to pay back the debt, both are freely forgiven by the creditor.

This is precisely what takes place in Private Confession, we go to the Pastor to confess our sins, both small and great, in order that our sins—our debts to the one, true God—are forgiven. But, we do not go to Private Confession just to confess our sins. If that is all that was taking place then no wonder it has fallen out of use among Lutherans, for it would be a very depressing, undesirable endeavor, for no one wants to talk about one's sins, especially the sins we do not want anyone to know, even God, even though that is impossible. But, my dear friends, this is not the case. We go to Private Confession to hear that our sins are forgiven; that we have been absolved; that our debt of sin is paid. We are told that God loves us and desires us to be gathered under His wing as a mother hen gathers her chicks.

This is why the Ministers of God offer the opportunity to partake of this blessed Sacrament to those entrusted to our care. And, it is why all of us should not only avail ourselves of that opportunity, but demand that the Minister called to watch over us should hear our confession as often as he can. For us poor, miserable sinners have a great need to hear that our sins are forgiven. We need to hear over and over again that God has not forsaken us, even though we have forsaken Him. In the Absolution we are reminded that our Lord suffered and died to pay for our debts, and St. Mary Magdalene's debts, and the Pharisee in our reading's debts, and even the debts of the all mankind, purely out of His great love for us.

It is on account of this that Private Confession has served as a way for one to examine himself, and for the Ministers to examine the one's entrusted to them, before receiving the Lord's Body and Blood given in bread and wine. That is to say, the word of forgiveness which is spoken to the penitent

in Private Confession is further evidenced by our participation in the Holy Supper.

St. Mary Magdalene, in her contrition, does not believe herself to be worthy to eat at the table with our Lord + Jesus until she is absolved. Our Lord having received her confession through her actions, offers that forgiveness for our Lord says, *“Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are freely forgiven, for she loved much.”*...Then He said to her, *“Your sins are forgiven.”* Our Lord makes her worthy by His Absolution of her, and He further confirms upon her that forgiveness with the words which we hear every time we receive our Lord’s Body and Blood in bread and wine, *“Go in peace,”* which we hear as, *“Depart in peace.”*

You can “depart in peace.” St. Mary Magdalene can “go in peace” because the breach that existed between her and God has been healed; the debt that she owed—the debt of death and eternal damnation—has been paid and is freely forgiven. This is what peace is, it is peace between you and God; there is no more any breach or conflict between you, for God has forgiven your sins, by sending His Son, our Lord + Jesus to fulfill the Law perfectly for you and to suffer and die in your place on the holy Cross. And when we cling to this reality in faith we are justified, that is, made right with God and remain at peace with Him.

Therefore, today let us give thanks to the blessed St. Mary Magdalene, the Penitent, for giving us an example of how we as penitent sinners should in all contrition boldly confess our sins to the man of God to whom we are entrusted, so that we might hear that our sins are forgiven and we have peace with God. For, we all have the need to hear, *“Your sins are forgiven...Depart in peace.”* In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*