

## Holy Year of Mercy

# An Act of Mercy . . . To Rule Them All

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year C

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*2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13*  
*Psalms 32:1-2, 5, 7, 11*

*Galatians 2:16, 19-21*  
*Luke 7:36-8:3*  
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In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the Hobbit, Frodo Baggins, conversing with Gandalf the Wizard about a wretched creature named Gollum, declares it a "pity" that his uncle, Bilbo, had not murdered Gollum at a previous encounter. Gandalf replies: "It was pity that stayed [Bilbo's] hand. Pity and Mercy....[Gollum] has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that [end] comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many." This prophecy proves true when, at the end, Frodo is too weak-willed to destroy the evil ring of power that so corrupted Gollum. Rather, it is Gollum, after wresting the ring from Frodo's grasp, who falls to his death in the cracks of Mount Doom, destroying the ring at last. (The book is vague as to whether Gollum fell, or jumped). Bilbo's pity spared Gollum to be the one who eventually, even unwittingly, destroys the ring.

In the story of the Penitent Woman, we see an equally wretched creature, loathed by all,



especially by Jesus' host, Simon the Pharisee. Despite the general sentiment, Jesus shows Mercy to this hated sinner, causing scandal to his host and the other guests (one can only imagine the gossip that ensued in the aftermath of the encounter).

Scripture never identifies this Penitent Woman. Our Tradition, however, has associated her with another woman featured in the Gospels: Mary Magdalene. It was Mary Magdalene and her sister Martha, whose brother Lazarus was raised from the dead, who grew to become among the closest friends of Jesus. It was Mary Magdalene (a



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## The Penitent Woman

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figure of *con-version*), who stood at the foot of the Cross along with another Mary (the Mother of Jesus, and the figure of *purity*). It was Mary Magdalene who became the first witness, and thereby the first evangelist, of the Resurrection itself. As wretched as the Penitent Woman was in her sins, as scandalous as it was for Jesus to show her Mercy, if the tradition is true, we see how the pity of Jesus ruled the fate of many.

These stories are a sharp contrast to the complete lack of Mercy on the part of King David, who found himself the subject of his own curse when, following his murder of Uriah the Hittite, he hears Nathan's parable of the Lamb, declaring "the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and had no pity." When Nathan reveals that David is the guilty one, God further compounds David's curse, declaring "the sword shall never depart from your house." Upon David's remorse, God shows David the very pity he failed to show Uriah, (and a mercy David failed to even show



himself), declaring David forgiven, at least on the part of God. David's curse of four-fold retribution, however, plays out in David's own children throughout the remainder of the Second Book of Samuel as: 1) his child by Bathsheba dies, 2) his daughter, Tamar, is ravish by her brother, Ammon, who in turn 3) is killed in vengeance by his brother Absalom, who 4) finally is assassinated by David's own men following his failed rebellion against his father.

As we begin the second half of the Year of Mercy called by Pope Francis, let us resolve to double our efforts to bring ourselves to a Mentality of Mercy, recognizing in the story of David the disastrous consequences attached to a lack of such mercy, while also recognizing in the example of Christ, compounded by the story of Bilbo Baggins, that true pity and mercy will, in the end, rule the fate of many.

Fr. Bill Nicholas  
June 10, 2016