



Vatican City, 20 April 2016 - The sincerity of our repentance inspires unconditional forgiveness from God. The Pope dedicated the catechesis of today's Wednesday general audience in St. Peter's Square, attended by tens of thousands of people, to this fundamental aspect of mercy.

Before the catechesis a passage was read from the Gospel of Luke, narrating the episode of the Pharisee Simon's invitation to Jesus to dine with him in his home. While they are seated, a woman enters, known throughout the city as a sinner. Without saying a word she falls to Jesus' feet and begins to weep; she washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair, after which she kisses them and anoints them with a perfumed oil she brought with her. The woman's attitude contrasts with that of Simon, who zealously observes the law and judges on the basis of appearances, and who does not understand why Jesus, the prophet, allows Himself to be "contaminated" by sinners as if they were lepers. The woman, on the other hand, expresses her repentance with sincere gestures and abandons herself trustfully to Jesus.

Simon's attitude, explained the Pope, "is typical of a certain way of understanding religion, and it is motivated by the fact that God and sin are radically opposed. But the Word of God teaches us to distinguish between the sinner and the sin: with sin we must not bow down to compromise, whereas sinners - that is, all of us! - are like the sick, who need to be cured, and to heal them the doctor must be close to them, examine them, and touch them. And naturally the sick, to be healed, must acknowledge that they are in need

of a doctor".

Between the Pharisee and the sinful woman, Jesus sides with the latter. "Free of prejudices that prevent mercy from being expressed, the Master allows ... Himself to be touched by her without fear of being contaminated. Indeed, entering into a relationship with the sinner, Jesus puts an end to the condition of isolation to which she had been condemned by the pitiless judgement of the Pharisee and his fellow citizens, who exploited her", Francis continued. "The woman can now, therefore, go 'in peace'. The Lord has seen the sincerity of her faith and her conversion, and therefore proclaims to her before everyone, 'Your faith has saved you'".

The story of the sinful woman teaches us the relationship between faith, love and gratitude. Her many sins were pardoned and for this reason she loves greatly; 'but he who is forgiven little, loves little', as even Simon himself admits. "God has enclosed all this in the same mystery of mercy; and from this love, which always precedes us, we all learn to love. ... Let us be grateful for the gift of faith, let us thank the Lord for His love, so great and undeserved! Let us allow Christ's love be poured into us ... and in this way, may the grateful love that we in turn bestow upon our brothers, in our homes, in the family, and in society, communicate the Lord's mercy to all".