

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time (Cycle C)

(2 Sm 12:7-10, 13; Gal 2:16, 19-21; Luke 7:36-8:3)

Fr. James Martin, Jesuit Priest and author tells this story about a Jesuit priest and a Franciscan priest who go on a road trip to Florida and are struck by a truck. The clouds part, and Heaven appears, and the two priests stand outside the pearly gates in eager anticipation.

Suddenly, the gates open and a red carpet rolls out to the feet of the Jesuit. As the priests stare, all the saints of Heaven come down the red carpet and embrace the Jesuit. A choir of angels begins to sing. Then, a blue carpet rolls out to the feet of the Jesuit and Holy Mother Mary comes down the carpet and embraces the Jesuit. Finally, a white carpet rolls out to the feet of the Jesuit, and Jesus walks down the carpet and embraces the Jesuit. Then all the angels, saints and Jesus and Mary enter into the City of God with the Jesuit and the gates close.

The Franciscan is left outside, alone. Then he sees a small door open, and a small Franciscan monk steps out, and beckons the priest into Heaven.

The Franciscan priest is bewildered. “Brother”, he asks, “can you tell me what’s going on? Now, I’m not complaining. I am very happy to be in Heaven, but my friend the Jesuit, got a red carpet, a blue carpet, a white carpet, all the angels and saints and Jesus and Mary to greet him.”

The monk pats the Franciscan priest warmly on his back as they walk into the Holy City.

“Ah, you see, Father,” says the monk, “that’s the first Jesuit they’ve seen up here in 50 years!”

Now, you have heard me tell jokes about Heaven before. In general, they are usually something about people coming before St. Peter and then having to pass some sort of test to prove that they are worthy of getting into Heaven or they may be like this one where someone is surprised in Heaven. Well, I’m pretty sure that this is NOT how one gets into Heaven.

So, how does a person get to Heaven? Each religion has its own answer, and there can be so many answers that getting into Heaven can appear to be mystery.

Now, some people believe that you can get to Heaven by doing Good Deeds.

Some people believe that you get to Heaven by saying certain prayers.

Some people believe that you get to Heaven only by God's grace.

I have spoken before about Rev. Don Piper, the author of "90 Minutes in Heaven", who was in a horrible accident, pronounced dead at the scene by EMTs, and then was found 90 minutes later to be alive. Rev. Piper says that in those 90 minutes he was in Heaven, and he describes in his book the wonders that he saw. His journey to Heaven was quick, He says that one minute he saw a semi-truck careening toward him, and the next minute he was surrounded by his deceased friends and relatives in the most peaceful and glorious place he has ever known.

Some people describe near death experiences where they see a tunnel with a light at the end. As they approach the light, they feel warmth and love. When they recover, they find themselves changed individuals.

Some people believe that they can never get to Heaven because they do not believe that they can ever be forgiven for the things that they have

done. To answer that, one needs only to reflect on today's Gospel reading.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus speaks of forgiveness for the woman with the alabaster jar. Jesus states:

“So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven because she has shown great love.

But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”

Jesus was telling the Pharisees and is telling us a little about God and about Heaven. Heaven is about forgiveness AND love because God is about forgiveness AND love.

Forgiveness and love are what our faith should be all about. Forgiveness and love are ours in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We don't have to wonder if God forgives us, we are granted absolution for our sins through our Lord, Jesus.

And not only does God love and forgive us, he asks us to love and forgive each other. That's not always easy to do. Believe me, I know.

But selfishness, hatred and resentment can fester inside us like an infection and in the end, we are sickened spiritually. We need a cure,

and the cure is Jesus' love and forgiveness. As St. Paul tells us in our Second Reading "I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me."

The sign given to us is one of living for others. Once we strip our selfishness away, we can truly love and forgive.

Jesus, also, tells us in the Gospels to love our enemies. To do good to those who persecute us. That, too, may seem a bit strange to us in our modern world. Our culture certainly isn't one of loving our enemies. If any of you have seen any action/adventure movie in the past 30 years, I doubt we would find any example of love and forgives. When one thinks of John Wayne, Sean Connery, Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwarzenegger or Samuel L. Jackson, one doesn't think normally of resolving a conflict by loving one's enemies.

In our world, the culture of violence and revenge causes conflicts to escalate out of control. We see this especially in the Middle East where each killing multiplies and multiplies as the hunger for vengeance drives reason away, but it is not unique to there.

Recently, at Ground zero in NY City, there was a protest concerning the proposed construction of a mosque near where the World Trade Centers stood. The angry crowd overheard some people standing nearby speaking in a foreign accent. They noticed that the men appeared to be Middle Eastern and attacked them thinking they were Muslim extremists. The men were actually Egyptian Coptic Catholics who were observing the protest.

Anger, hatred and hard feelings can fester and cause sickness in our souls.

Jesus asked us to forgive others...and he asks us to love each other, as he loves us.

Why love? How can love conquer?

Abraham Lincoln once said, "Am I not destroying my enemies when I make friends of them?"

God loves us all...the good, the bad and the ugly. God forgives us all, and he asks us to do the same.

And if we do, then getting into Heaven won't be any mystery at all.