**Homily – 45th Ordination Anniversary - Sat. Sept. 24, 2017 – 12 Noon – St. Polycarp**

**The final Jeopardy Category is – *Political Downfalls***

**Here is the clue: In what year, just months apart, did a sitting Governor and a sitting President see their future political careers, implode? Thirty seconds, please.**

The answer is: 1972. George Wallace of Alabama was shot in Laurel, MD during a political rally, on May 15. One month later on June 17 the famous Watergate Break-in was the beginning of the downfall of President Richard Nixon.

Here are some other events that grabbed headlines in 1972:

* Michelangelo’s “Pieta” was hacked with a sledgehammer by a deranged man.
* Sally Preisand became the first female U.S. Jewish Rabbi.
* Two famous people born in May 1972 were: Dwayne Johnson who would become “The Rock,” and Manny Ramirez who would grow up to help the Boson Red Sox win the World Series in 2014,
* Two famous people who died that month were: J. Edgar Hoover and Dan Blocker, whom we knew as “Hoss” on Bonanza.
* Three young men, Paul Mast, Bill Lawlor & Carmen Vignola were ordained priests for the Diocese of Wilmington on May 5.
* Riva Ridge won the Kentucky Derby in 1972.
* N Y Rangers won the Stanley Cup
* L.A. Lakers won the NBA Championship
* Oakland A’s beat the Cincinnati Reds 4 games to 3 to win the World Series.
* Most popular TV shows in 1972 were: Columbo, My 3 Sons, Bewitched and The Courtship of Eddie’s Father.
* “The French Connection” won the Best Picture Oscar in 1972

Gene Hackman won for Best Actor as “Popeye Doyle” in “The French Connection”

* Jane Fonda won the Best Actress Oscar for the movie, “Klute.”
* In 1972 the price of a car was $3,879.00, a gallon of milk was $1.33, a loaf of bread was .28 cents and a gallon of gas was .36 cents.
* I’ll pause for a moment while we have a collective sigh.
* 45 years ago, I was a young 25-year old energetic priest, with a Messiah complex, ready to save the world. Now I am a 71-year old priest, conserving energy thanks to letting Jesus Christ be my Messiah. According to Mark Twain, I have reached the “threshold of life.” I don’t know what he means by that, but I do know that it comes with learning a new set of A, B, C’s – **arthritis, bursitis, and cataracts.**

Much of the socio-cultural and political landscape has changed greatly in 45 years.

A smart-alec in 1972 is now a “bully”

Embezzlers have become “Ponzi-schemers”

Busy bodies in 1972 have become “hackers”

Conversation in sentences are now reduced to LOL, BTW, AFK, TTYL

A Rand-McNally Atlas is now GPS

The Princess phone is now a Smartphone

Sitting down at a kitchen table for meals has been replaced with fast food lanes

Spouses with emotional issues have become “abusers”

Some respected clergy, coaches, teachers have become “sexual predators”

Families who once pretended to be normal now create “domestic violence”

Arrogant bosses are now unmasked for “sexual harassment”

People down on their luck in 1972 are now “homeless”

A person on drugs is now part of the wider world of “opioid addiction”

An angry driver, in 1972, who caused an accident is now a “road-rager”

Fraternal bonding on college campuses has morphed into “hazing” and criminal.

The common good in 1972 is now replaced with the left or right or alt-right

The evil of Nazism, once defeated by what Tom Brokaw called “The Greatest Generation,” is, 72 years later, rising from the ashes of hate as the Neo-Nazi’s

Politicians who once served a constituency now serve “political lobbyists”, and

The leader of the free world can’t tell the difference between respective discourse and vulgar tweets.

That is a short list of how I see the world of today as different from the world of 1972. Because it’s different doesn’t mean it’s all bad. It does mean we have to work harder at applying the virtue of compassion to a broken, intolerant, sometimes violent and prejudiced world.

As people of faith, we don’t turn to Dr. Phil or Judge Judy for answers to our woes. We turn to the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is our role model, not TV celebrities, who, one day, will pass away with their fame. I selected this reading from St. Luke 7:36-50 because woven into it, are themes and characters who reflect the state of the world in 2017.

So, let’s take a deeper look at the gospel story to see ourselves in those characters. Let’s look at them in a way that changes hearts and fine tunes ears in order to grow in a new desire not to miss Jesus in the messes of our personal world….Jesus the healer, who is the only one in the story free of judgments and full of compassion.

-2-

There are only three characters in the story: a Penitent woman, a judgmental Pharisee and Jesus, teacher and storyteller.

The setting is a dinner party. Jesus never turned down an invitation to dinner. In this case, it’s not about tangible food. There’s no mention of a menu. There are deeper hungers to be named and satisfied. This dinner is all about a woman sinner hungering for the intangible food of mercy. At the same time, it is about awaking a judgmental man to a hunger for the food of conversion. To satisfy those hungers, Jesus will serve the food of love, prepared two different ways.

The Pharisee has insulted his guest by ignoring Jewish hospitality traditions. No water for the dusty feet of his guest; no oil for his parched hands and face. This would be the equivalent today of you or me hosting a dinner party, but not welcoming our guests at the door or serving appetizers. That’s a dead giveaway that we never watch the “Rachel Ray” show.

A woman known in the town to be a sinner, arrives uninvited and upstages the host. She does what he neglected to do. She lavishes great love on the guest of honor. She does not hold back her tears and is generous with anointing the feet of Jesus with perfumed oil.

Notice two things: (1) She has no name, because she stands for ever sinner who hungers for the mercy of God. (2) She has no lines. She doesn’t suffer from the American addiction to talk things to death. She wanted compassion, not conversation. She doesn’t need words. Her humility, her tears and anointing say everything.

Meanwhile, the Pharisee empowers the wrong voice in his head to dominate his heart. He speaks, but only to himself. This is the typical passive-aggressive behavior that fuels so much of human sinfulness. He personifies the wisdom saying: “*A judgmental heart keeps listening to the things that annoy.”* **His behavior reminds me of a Native American Indian story.**

Simon is annoyed that the woman of ill-repute is making him look bad. Meanwhile, Jesus practices a little psychic-therapy, without letting Simon know that he is a mind reader. Rather than shaming him, Jesus tells Simon a story, that, hopefully, will stir a conversion in him. Simon needs compassion also.

The story is about a generous money-lender, two debtors, and forgiving both debts. Then, comes the unmasking of the moral lesson. Jesus, as teacher, asks Simon a question: “You see this woman?” Jesus doesn’t give him time to answer, because he didn’t see a woman. The voice in his head labeled her “a sinner.” Once that happened Simon was blind to her treating Jesus with lavish love. That led to his reservations about Jesus not being who he thinks he is.

This monologue is an invitation for Simon to have a conversion; a spiritual heart bypass, where his arteries, lined with the plaque of being judgmental, can be replaced with the kind of penitent spirit that possesses the woman. Her penitent heart captured the compassion of Jesus more than the small mindedness of the Pharisee. But, like the money-lender, who forgave both debtors, Jesus is compassionate to both characters.

-3-

Let me interface this story with our world of modern technology, to see what lessons we can draw for our spiritual journey, in 2017. St. Luke included it in his gospel as a teaching tool for his young, growing Christian Community. He wanted them to identify with both the sinful woman, with a checkered past and the sinful Pharisee, with a habit for prejudging people. Both of those types were in St. Luke’s community.

They were the ones who needed the mercy of God to free them from their sins of self-absorption, as the sinful woman did, as well as the compassion of God when their habits kicked in to prejudge and label people, like Simon. Luke wanted them to focus on Jesus for a better way of living and interacting.

For reasons we do not know, the sinful woman got tired of clicking on the apps of lust, prostitution and shame that left her inner life depleted of respect and self-worth. Hearing that the teacher & healer, Jesus of Nazareth was coming to this dinner party, she clicked on a new app; the app of repentance. Imagine how she must have felt hearing the words: *“Your sins are forgiven…go in peace.”* No one had ever spoken to her like that before. We can only imagine how her life was changed.

Simon’s sin is more subtle. He clicked on the app of judging the woman as a sinner, and Jesus as a disappointment. The one who stands out from these two characters is Jesus. He has compassion for both.

Rather than clicking on the app of shaming Simon, Jesus draws him into a story. It is intended to awaken him to how small and suffocating his life is with his prejudices and his habit for labeling people. Jesus practices a different kind of compassion with him – a gentle call to conversion; to forgive himself, to like himself more, by judging people less. The good news in this story is how Jesus downloaded new apps on their souls.

In the past 45 years, part of my job description has been to create spaces where conversion and compassion meet. I do that as a spiritual director. Since I became computer literate some 25 years ago, I have practiced that piece of priestly ministry like a computer programmer for wounded and searching souls. Helping people to delete old programs and apps, rooted in habits that diminish the quality of life, has awakened my imagination to ministry as one who uploads new programs and apps for people’s souls that enhance the quality of life.

2017 is a different world from 1972. But, the mercy and compassion of Jesus is the same, today, yesterday and forever. May that be a piece of good news you take with you today, along with the haunting words and melody of a song. Hum it and sing it whenever you need to click on the inner app of diffusing prejudice with compassion and anger with peacemaking.

-4-