

SEPTEMBER 18 2025 FATHER FRANCIS SALASAR

There is an incident narrated of a man who went to church regularly. But one day, he forgot to put his phone on silent and the unthinkable happened. It rang during the Mass. The man, embarrassed and humiliated by the interruption, was further scolded by the pastor and admonished by other worshippers. The people who were sitting next to him shook their heads in disgust. After the service, his wife continued to berate him on their way home.

Still fraught by the experience, he decided to go to the bar to have a drink. The glass fell and shattered on the floor. Those in touch rushed to help him. He closed his eyes expecting some scolding and frowning. Instead, they cared to know if he was okay. The waiter apologized and gave him a napkin to clean himself. The janitor mopped the floor, and the female manager offered him another drink on the house. She also gave him a huge hug saying, "Don't worry, man. Who doesn't make a mistake?"

He has stopped going to the church. He has never stopped going into the bar. Sometimes our attitude as believers may drive people away from the Church, from our families, and from the people of God.

And that's what we hear in the gospel of today. Jesus is invited to dine at the house of Simon, a Pharisee. On the surface, this seemed like an honour, but Simon's hospitality is half-hearted. He offers no water for Jesus' feet, no kiss of greeting, no oil for anointing. He wants to observe Jesus, perhaps even judge Him, but not welcome Him with love.

Then enters a woman known in the city as a sinner. Everyone knows her reputation. She brings an alabaster jar of ointment, falls at Jesus' feet, weeping, washing His feet with her tears, and drying them with her hair, kissing them, and anointing them. Simon is scandalized. He thinks, "If this man were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman this is." To him, she's unworthy. She doesn't belong at the table.

But Jesus sees differently. He looks at her, not through the eyes of judgment, but through the eyes of mercy. He welcomes her, forgives her sins, and sends her away with peace. Simon's problem is not his knowledge of the law or his religious practice. It is his self-righteousness. He places himself above others, especially this woman, and even above Jesus Himself. He believes that he can measure who belongs and who doesn't.

Self-righteousness is a subtle, but deadly, spiritual disease. It blinds us to our own need for mercy. It convinces us that our goodness, our traditions, our religious observances make us superior to others. It makes us gatekeepers instead of disciples. And tragically, it can push people away from God, the Church, or from our family or relationships.

Simon the Pharisee lives on in each of us. Whenever we whisper about someone else fast, whenever we roll our eyes at someone who doesn't behave as we think they should, whenever we close the doors of mercy that Jesus came to fling wide open. Today's gospel is a stark reminder that the Church is not a museum of saints. It's a hospital for sinners.

When people walk through our doors, they should not feel the cold stare of judgment, but the warmth of Christ's mercy and love. Through us, they should know how God is loving and merciful. Every person, no matter their past, their appearance, their struggles, should find in each of us the embrace of Jesus.

We must ask ourselves, "Am I a bridge to Christ, or a barrier?" "Do my words and actions draw people closer to God, or do they push them away?" Let us not forget that the greatest scandal in the gospel is not the woman's sin, but Simon's self-righteousness. Her sin led her to seek mercy. His self-righteousness kept him from receiving it.

The real danger for us as believers is not that we fall into sin. We all do. But that we will fall into pride, forgetting our need for God's mercy and closing the door to others.

So, dear brothers and sisters, as we celebrate this Eucharist, let us seek the grace to understand the need for mercy for ourselves, and maybe become channels of mercy to others. We are called to be the face of God's mercy to the world. We go into the world, our families, our communities, carrying this message of love. That through us, all will know of God's love.