

TALK 12th JUNE 2016 Puy de Serre Morning Worship
Luke 7:36- 8:3 Galatians 2:15-21 2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:10, 13-15

'The Servant Queen and the King she serves'. Title of the book prepared by Mark Greene and Catherine Butcher to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's 90th birthday. The date of February 6th 1952 is etched in my memory. I was in the final year of Junior School and we were about to start a lesson. Our teacher, Miss Raine, came in looking very serious and said gravely, 'I have to tell you the sad news that the King has died today. The school is closing and you will all go home for the rest of the day'.

Of course we didn't understand the implications of the King's death, but can you imagine what thoughts ran through the Queen's head, as she realised that **she** would now be **Queen**, with all the responsibilities the role of sovereign carried? However, in her **first** Christmas broadcast, in 1952, she confirmed her own Christian faith and asked the people of the Commonwealth and Empire to pray for her, adding that she had been, and remained, very grateful for people's prayers to that point - and to God for his **steadfast love**. **Every year** since, in her Christmas message, she has made some *référence* to her Christian faith.

Its right that we do celebrate the Queen's long and distinguished service, but what's this got to do with today's Gospel Reading? Luke focuses our attention on someone who would be regarded as being at the other extrême of the social hierarchy to the Queen.. Jesus had been invited out to dinner and his host was a man called Simon, a Pharisee -someone who lived strictly within the law of the Old Testament, as interpreted by the Jews of that period.

Simon was a deeply religious man and, as a Pharisee, was well educated, but also somewhat smug about the superiority his position gave him. He didn't really like Jesus, whom he saw as having scant regard for the letter of the law- healing sick people on the Sabbath-day and teaching that **love** was more **important** than the law. However, his **friends** would know that this interesting rabbi had visited him.

The court yard where Simon and his guests would have been eating was open to the street, so any passer-by could wander in. It was the custom, when a rabbi, a teacher, visited a house such as this, people from the area came to listen to him, and a woman of the streets walked in. The Old Testament, of course, condemns prostitution but, in practice, it was **tolerated**, though no **respectable** person would be seen talking to such a woman.

It has to be remembered, though, that, in the culture of the time, widows and divorced women, had no financial support from their families and had little option but to either beg on the streets or become prostitutes, if they were to avoid starvation. However, this woman knew she was regarded as a sinner and would have little confidence or self-worth.

Then she hears Jesus saying that love is the fulfilment of the law- that it was impossible to fully observe every aspect of the Law- and that what was important was to comply with the law of **love**. Here was what she was wanting to hear, here was a **friend** to the **friendless** and probably the first man to treat her as a person. She knew he was someone **spécial** and believed in him and in his message. As was the custom, the guests would be reclining on couches, letting their feet breathe

by removing their sandals. Usually the host would have greeted his visitor with a kiss of peace, had water poured over his dusty feet, and would probably have burned some incense to sweeten the air.

Simon had apparently not done any of this. The woman, however, stood near Jesus, poured a bottle of expensive perfume over his feet, washed them with her tears, and wiped them with her long hair. The self-satisfied Pharisee was appalled that Jesus didn't send her away.

Jesus seized the opportunity to tell a story, a parable, about **forgiveness**- the one we heard in the Reading from Luke, about the two debtors. One only owed a **little**, and showed **little** gratitude when the moneylender cancelled his debt; the other who owed **far** more, was deeply grateful when he was released from **his** debt.

Jesus was making the point that it's **gratitude** that breeds love, not observance of the **letter** of the law. The prostitute felt seriously guilty and rejected but, when she heard Jesus talk of a God who forgives sinners, her heart warmed to this God and she wanted to know more about him.

On the other hand, the Pharisee believed he'd done all that the Law required of him, and that he did not need any forgiveness. So, this upright man was **complacent** - he completely failed to follow the law of love, while the woman was complying with the only law that matters. Which do we think is more important? To do **nothing legally wrong** -or to respond positively to the love of God, as shown in Jesus?

Love means forgetting **ourselves** and our **own** feelings, and having **other people's** needs as our focus. Our own wishes are forgotten; we don't make others feel **inferior** but praise them and build up their **self-respect**. We find that doing this makes **us** feel better, happy, and there's nothing wrong with that. But it should not make us feel proud or conceited.

Jesus has told us that we should not pat ourselves on the back, or look for peer approval, because our **Father** sees what we do in secret and will reward us. We should be able to look back on our lives and be grateful for the **wonderful** things God has helped us to do - and give **him** all the praise.

The host had not shown any love or respect towards Jesus yet **the woman** had done so. She saw what was needed **-and did something about it**. She had made contact with Jesus, established a **loving** relationship with him, what we call **faith**. Jesus said to her, '[Your faith has saved you. Go in peace](#)'.

Jesus was, and is, the friend of all, rich or poor, royal or rejected- and he expects us to get on with, to serve, each other. If, like the Queen, we regard him as King of our lives, we must not judge or despise **anyone**. Neither you nor I know what has **made** them what they are, but we are all made in his image. Jesus wants us to comply with his law of **love**, rather than simply being law-abiding, but with no **love** in our hearts.

So, like the woman off the streets, we too should accept our Lord's forgiveness, his promise of salvation. Then let's focus on the needs of others, and find lasting **peace**.

