NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

A little honesty

Roger Karban | Jun. 15, 2013 Spiritual Reflections

Some scholars of the Christian Scriptures insist we?ll never be able to get an accurate picture of the historical Jesus just by reading the four Gospels. They believe the portraits we find in those writings have been so deeply colored by the authors? faith in him that the ?real? Jesus has been permanently lost. Yet when pressed, even they admit there?s at least one thing about the Gospel Jesus that?s historically accurate: he was a friend of sinners. No one in the early church would have dared invent that characteristic.

Yet Jesus? actions follow a biblical pattern: sinners are woven into all our sacred writings.

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13
Psalm 32
Galatians 2:16, 19-21
Luke 7:36 - 8:3

Today?s 2 Samuel reading is part of one of the most significant sections in the Hebrew Scriptures: the Throne Succession Narratives -- stories contained in 2 Samuel 10-20 and 1 Kings 1-2 -- probably composed in the 10th century BCE that tell us how Solomon eventually succeeded to his father David?s throne.

The first step in Solomon?s succession was to get his mother and father together. The author accomplishes that in the famous rooftop bath encounter. Not only does David commit adultery, he panics when he discovers that Bathsheba is pregnant, which leads to arranging to have her husband, Uriah, killed in battle to cover up the royal dalliance.

Nathan the prophet confronts David with an allegorical description of his crimes, ending with the powerful statement: ?That man is you!? His accusation is in today?s reading at Mass.

The prophet first lists all the things Yahweh has done for the king over the years, then dramatically points out how David?s actions with Uriah and Bathsheba aren?t exactly what God expected in return.

But Nathan doesn?t demand the impossible. David can?t bring Uriah back from the dead or reverse his adulterous actions with Bathsheba. The prophet can only hope David will say what he eventually does say: ?I have sinned against Yahweh.? Without such honesty, Yahweh can?t forgive.

Though the Israelites traditionally regarded David as their greatest king, our sacred authors didn?t hesitate to

point out the weak, sinful areas of his personality. Stories about real, sinful people carrying out God?s will are why these special writings were saved and eventually passed on to us. Those who originally heard these narratives identified with the people in the stories. They certainly weren?t plastic saints; they had tremendous faults. But they also had one saving grace: their honesty. After acknowledging their sinfulness, they still went about trying to integrate God?s will into their daily lives, and they ended up being ?justified? in God?s eyes.

Paul composed Galatians, the most forceful of his seven letters, because some in the community held they could be justified by keeping the 613 laws of Moses. The Apostle remind his community that, despite these ?Judiazers,? they?re justified by faith in Christ.? He defines what that faith means: ?I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.? In other words, those who ?believe? in Jesus demonstrate their faith by dying with Jesus.

For Paul, we die with Jesus by becoming one with those around us ? even sinners - especially during the Eucharist.

The woman forgiven in today?s Gospel obviously doesn?t go through the formal steps we learned in our first confession classes. She is forgiven simply ?because she has shown great love.?

Significantly, Jesus doesn?t say what we expect him to say: ?I forgive you.? He simply says, ?Your sins are forgiven.? He celebrates her forgiveness; he doesn?t cause it. He?s just the proclaimer of something that had already happened before he even starts to talk. Filled with joy, the woman endures public scorn to come into the house to express her love for Jesus.

At the end of today?s Gospel, Luke tells of Jesus? faithful women followers. Mark and Matthew will do the same, but not until Jesus? death on Golgotha. Only Luke mentions them as accompanying Jesus on his famous journey to Jerusalem. They not only follow him, ?... they provide for him (and the Twelve) out of their resources.?

The late Jesuit scripture scholar Frank Cleary, looking at just the names of some of Jesus? female disciples, pinpointed the possible ?evil spirits? this itinerant preacher had cast out of them. He concluded these were women who could easily be abused by men, and probably had already been treated in that way. Women were attracted to Jesus precisely because he became one with them, accepting them as they were, without using them for his own purposes.

I presume Jesus demands of his church what Nathan demanded of David: a little honesty -- including facing up to our long history of gender discrimination.

[Roger Vermalen Karban is a priest of the Belleville, Ill., diocese and pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Renault, Ill.]

Source URL (retrieved on *05/06/2016 - 19:53*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/spiritual-reflections/little-honesty