



CHAPTER 7: 39-50

# The Gospel of Luke

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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

Luke's gospel is a compilation of various interviews with eye-witnesses and close followers of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). The author, Luke, probably did not become a Christian until several years after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is first mentioned (implicitly) in Acts 16:10 (Acts is another book of the New Testament which Luke wrote). He did not, therefore, meet Jesus in the flesh and he himself was not an eye-witness.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

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### **Continuation of Luke 7: 39-50**

Ver. 39.—*Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, this man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner, and therefore unfit to touch a holy prophet. This Pharisee was, as S. Augustine says (Serm. 23), one of those self-righteous men, of whom Isaiah wrote, chap. lii. II.*

But Simon's reasoning was false, for the unclean touched Christ that they might be cleansed by Him. For this cause He came into the world, that as the good physician, He might heal all manner of diseases, whether of the body or of the soul. He was offended, therefore, because, as Euthymius says, he knew not that Christ, although very God, was made man to save sinners. And, again, the Magdalene was not now unclean, for she had been cleansed by contrition, as Christ proceeded to show. Simon was deceived, because he judged of the past, and not of the present. For Mary was the same, yet another. Another, yet her very self, says Chrysologus (Serm. 74). Wherefore the humble penitent was holier than the proud Pharisee, who, if he had

not already sinned as deeply as the Magdalene, was liable from his spiritual pride to fall into as great a sin. S. Augustine (*in loc. cit.*). Hence in many things the Pharisee offended, as Toletus shows. Therefore, S. Gregory (*Hom. 33*), concludes thus: "We should in another's fall lament our own sin; for perhaps, under similar circumstances, we should in like manner offend, and although punishment should always follow on sin, we ought to make a distinction, to be harsh and severe in our treatment of vice, but to be compassionate to the weakness of human nature. For though the sinner must be punished, he must be gently dealt with, as our neighbour."

Ver. 40.—*And Jesus answering* (the secret thoughts of his heart) *said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.* S. Augustine, Theophylact, Bede and others, think that this Simon was not Simon, the leper, in whose house the Magdalene again anointed the feet of Jesus. S. John xii. 2, S. Matt. xxvi. 6. Others are of a contrary opinion, because the name is the same, and because the circumstances of the second anointing are so similar. It seems, however, that this Simon was converted when Christ was on his way from Galilee to Judæa (S. Matt. xix. i); and that he followed Jesus, and settled at Bethany, near S. Mary Magdalene, who was known to him, in order to enjoy with her the presence and teaching of Christ.

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*I have somewhat to say unto thee.* See how wisely Christ reproves Simon with these gentle but meaning words, which appealed to his better feelings, and at once arrested his attention. For, as S. Augustine says, Christ desired to correct the error of his thoughts, in return for the entertainment which he had provided. And S. Luke implies that Simon at once recognised his fault, for he answered modestly, Master, say on. As Thy disciple, I will gladly accept Thy words as the teaching of my Master.

Ver. 41.—*There was a certain creditor which had two debtors.* The debtors, says S. Ambrose, are those who owe God, the heavenly creditor, not actual money, but a return of good works and of virtue. Our debts, therefore, are our sins, by which we do despite to God, and for which we should make atonement. But we cannot make atonement unto God, and therefore are in danger of hell fire. For the Syriac creditor implies the same as usurer, and the Greek word *δανεισθηζ* answers to the Hebrew *דַּנְשָׁה*, and signifies one who gives, either outright, or on usury. Deut. xv. 6, xxviii. 12; Ecclus. xxix. 1 and 2.

*One owed five hundred pence and the other fifty.* The Roman denarius or penny, originally of the value of ten asses, was worth about eight pence of our modern money. In this parable we are to understand by the two debtors, Mary Magdalene, and Simon the Pharisee; who is not mentioned by name, lest he should be offended or disheartened. This is clear from the following verses wherein the Magdalene is thrice, by antithesis, brought into comparison with Simon, and preferred to him. She, therefore, is the debtor who owed five hundred pence, who considered that she owed

God much more because of her sins than Simon; and therefore, that she might obtain forgiveness, she loved more and showed greater proofs of her love. But Simon owed only fifty pence, his sins were but venial, and therefore he considered that he owed little to God. He was self-righteous, and thought that he had little or no need of repentance.

But S. Augustine rightly observes, for this very reason he ought all the more to acknowledge that he was a debtor to God, who had preserved him from committing greater offences. Thou wast not an adulterer (as the Magdalene) in that past life of thine which thou dost ignore. But it was God who kept thee from sinning, preserved thee from temptation, and from the power of the tempter. Acknowledge then what thou owest to Him who has kept thee from evil. For there is no sin which one man has committed that another man may not commit, if God withdraw His guidance from him.

Ver. 42.—*And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?* (loves him most, Vulg.) *i.e.* “in verity,” or “ought” to love him most. For a similar Hebraism, see Amos v. 13. The prudent shall keep silence in that time, *i.e.* they were being silent or it behoved them to be silent.

The meaning is, As he who has been forgiven much, is accounted to have received forgiveness because of his deserts, so debtors who owe much, are wont to show the utmost deference to their creditors, in order to obtain from them, if not forgiveness of their debt, at least favourable terms of payment. In like manner, Simon, thou shouldest have known that the Magdalene loved me with a greater love than thine. For she showed greater proofs of her love, and therefore her sins, which are many, are forgiven, because she loved much. Wherefore, she is no longer a sinner, nor, as thou thinkest, unworthy to touch my feet; but holier than thou, and more worthy to be touched by me. The parable, therefore, plainly teaches us, that the more we love, the more we shall be forgiven.

So S. Augustine (*Hom.* 23), “The more she loved Me, and shows her love, the more do I forgive.” But if we take the Greek rendering *ἀγαπήσει*, and translate according to the English version, the argument is inverted. For although the love of the creditor, as shown in the forgiveness of the debt, excites in return the love of the debtor, yet at the same time it is the love of the debtor, in seeking to make payment of the debt, which causes the creditor to forgive. So De Lyra, Francis Lucas, and others. Hence the parable in one sense teaches us, that as the debtor who has been forgiven the most, loves his creditor the more, so Christ because he had forgiven the many sins of the Magdalene, will be the more beloved by her. But Christ desired also to show, not only that her sins were forgiven, but the reason, and the manner of their forgiveness, *i.e.* on account, of her love, so that we, taking example by her, may, in like manner obtain forgiveness.

Another explanation is given by S. Ambrose (*De Tobia, cap.* xxii.). Christ forgave the sins of the Magdalene, which increased her love and gratitude to Him; but, Christ foresaw this increase of love, and therefore from the very first forgave her. Again, S.

but, secure against all evil, rests in perfect peace.”

This perfect peace Christ gave to the Magdalene, for God’s work is perfect (*Deut.* xxxii. 4), and therefore those whom Christ cleansed were made perfectly whole. He therefore,

1. Uprooted from the Magdalene’s heart all vicious habits, all evil recollections and fleshly lusts, and restored to her true peace of mind.
2. Endued her, not only with chastity, humility and penitence, but also with,
3. A contempt for earthly things, and a love for heavenly; and
4. Kindled in her heart an ardent love, which caused her to dedicate herself and all she had to His service.

Hence she followed Christ as He went about the villages preaching, and ministered unto Him of her substance, resigning the cares of the family to her sister Martha, that she might wholly devote herself to the teaching of the Lord.

Hence she heard from His lips the words, “Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her,” S. Luke xi. 42. Hence also she stood at the foot of the Cross, and beheld Christ washing away, by His blood, those sins which she had washed with her tears, and afterwards, with a yet more fervent love, withdrawing into the desert she gave herself up to the contemplation of His life, His passion and His resurrection, and, wholly devoted to His service, lived henceforth for heaven and not for earth.

Such also was the conversion of S. Paul, and therefore he was endued with all Christian and Apostolic virtues. See Acts ix. A similar conversion of heart and mind, we are told, was experienced by S. Cyprian at his baptism (*Lib.* ii. *Epist.* 2, *ad Donat.*); and by S. Augustine (*Confess. lib.* ix. *cap.* i., *lib.* viii. *cap.* ii.)

Wherefore Origen, in his noble Homily on the Magdalene, figuratively says, “We may follow the example of this woman, in order to obtain a similar blessing. For we may confidently draw nigh unto Jesus, since He did not withdraw Himself from the sinner who sought Him. Learn then from her, O sinner, to mourn over the absence of God from thy soul, and to seek His presence again. Learn from Mary to love Jesus, to hope in Jesus, and by seeking Jesus to find Him. Learn from her to fear no opposition, to refuse to be comforted without Him, and to count all things but loss for His sake. Hence see the power of grace, and of the love of Christ.”

“Love conquers all things.” “Love can control the savage lion, and love alone has power to lead captive the hearts of men,” for “love is strong as death,” Cant. viii. 6.

Pharisee thought he had few, if any sins, not because he had no love, for he showed some love in that he invited our Lord." And again, "O Pharisee, thou lovest little, not because little is forgiven thee, but because thou thoughtest that there was little which needed forgiveness." Toletus remarks, "Little was forgiven Simon, because by the grace of God he had been preserved from committing sin, for he had entertained Christ, and not persecuted him as the other Pharisees. Hence it is very probable that afterwards this Pharisee became a true follower of Christ." See further Suarez, *Parte iii., de Gratia*, lib. viii. cap. x.

Ver. 48.—*And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.* Francis Lucas thinks that the Magdalene's sins were at this time and by these words forgiven. See preceding verse. Christ now turns to the Magdalene, and repeats that which He had said just before to Simon, in order to comfort her grief, to confirm her pardon, and show that He had power and authority to forgive sins, and that He therefore was the Messiah, and God. Euthymius.

Ver. 49.—*And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, i.e. to reason in their hearts, for they did not dare to express their thoughts lest they should be put to rebuke.*

*Who is this that forgiveth sins also?* Is it the Messiah? Is it God, for God alone can forgive sins! Christ leaves them a prey to wonder and to doubt, in order that they might be led to inquire into His life, doctrine and miracles, and see in Him the Son of God.

Ver. 50.—*And He saith to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.* Faith, not alone, as, the innovators hold, but fruitful in good works, such as the Magdalene had displayed, and love. For a little before, v. 47, Christ had ascribed her forgiveness to her love. We must here understand, therefore, not a barren faith, but a faith which showed itself in her acts of contrition and love.

*Hath saved thee, i.e. hath freed thee from sin, and made thee meet for salvation.* Thy loving faith hath placed thee in the way of salvation, and if thou continuest therein, thou wilt lay hold upon eternal life, for a readiness to serve God is the way to glory.

*Go in peace.* Be no longer downcast and distressed by reason of thy sins: they have now no power to hurt thee, nor to make thy conscience afraid. Euthymius. The fruit of repentance, forgiveness, and of a conscience void of offence, is peace and spiritual joys, which far exceed those which the world can give, as it is written, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Rom. v. 1; and again, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ," Phil. iv. 7. So also, "He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast," Prov. xv. 15. S. Bernard, in his sermon on the Magdalene, very fitly remarks, "The joy which a perfect heart looks for from an untroubled conscience is a lasting happiness. For the heart which is cleansed from this world's corruptions, and whose desires are fixed on God, joys only in the Lord, and rejoices only in God its Saviour. The soul of such an one despises the threats of the enemy, casts away fear, is not a prey to false hopes,

Gregory (*lib. vi. epist. 22*), and after him Toletus: The greater the debt, which is forgiven the greater the gratitude of the debtor. When, therefore, O Simon, thou sawest in the Magdalene such great signs of love, thou shouldst have inferred how much had been forgiven her. For as the cause may be inferred from the effect, so her love was the result of her forgiveness. See then how rashly thou hast condemned this woman, when thou shouldst have known, from the abundant signs of love and gratitude which she had shown, that all her sins, however great their number, had been forgiven. But this interpretation is at variance with the 47th verse, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much." The word "for" or "because" shows that her love was not the effect but the cause of her forgiveness. See *infra*, v. 47.

Ver. 43.—*Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.* Christ praises the answer, in order that Simon might the more readily accept the reproof and the lessons to be drawn therefrom.

Ver. 44.—*And He turned unto the woman, and said unto Simon, seest thou this woman?* He turned, because the Magdalene stood behind Him, for from consciousness of her guilt, she did not dare to meet His sight. Seest thou this woman? no longer, as thou thinkest, a sinner, but a penitent reconciled with God.

*I entered into thine house, but thou gavest Me no water for My feet.* It was the custom in those days to wash the feet of one's guests before they sat down to meat, both for purposes of cleansing and refreshment. Thus Abraham washed the feet of the Angels, Gen. xviii. 4, and Lot, Gen. xix. 2. See also Judges xix. 21. Whence S. Paul considers that a widow may be set apart for the service of God, "if she have washed the saints' feet," 1 Tim. v. 10.

Christ had come as a guest to the house, and therefore Simon should have washed His feet. Christ therefore reproached him for his want of consideration and care, and contrasts his conduct with the love of the Magdalene. For Titus says, "It is an easy matter to provide water, but difficult to supply such an abundance of tears."

Ver. 45.—*Thou gavest Me no kiss, but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet,* "with reverence and godly fear." Titus. Guests were in old times received with a kiss in sign of affection and welcome. But Simon omitted this salutation. Hence "It was thy duty, O Simon, to receive Me, thy invited guest, with a kiss of welcome, but the Magdalene has more than made up for thy neglect, for she hath continued to kiss, not My face, but My feet, from the moment I entered Thy house."

Ver. 46.—*My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath*

*anointed My feet with ointment.* The more valued the guest, the more precious the perfumes wherewith He was anointed. Thou didst not anoint My head, but she hath anointed My feet with very precious ointment. See again how she excelleth thee in love and devotion. "Not that the Lord," as Ambrose says, "valued the ointment, but rather the love, the faith, and the humility." Hence Christ concludes,

Ver. 47.—*Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.* Greek, *ἀφένεται*, have been forgiven. At what time, we may ask, were her sins forgiven?

1. Francis Lucas thinks at the time when the Lord said unto her, "Thy sins are forgiven," v. 48.
2. Others are of opinion that her sins were forgiven when our Lord in this present verse declared unto Simon the fact of her pardon.
3. But it seems more probable that her sins were forgiven at some time antecedent, *i.e.* when she felt true contrition for her offences. Because when by the grace of God she had been led to see the heinousness of her sin, so deep was her contrition and sorrow, that she thereby regained the divine favour, and so her love for God and her sorrow for her sins impelled her to show openly the reality of her repentance, and therefore before Christ could say unto her, "Thy sins are forgiven," she had obtained forgiveness by reason of her complete penitence.

We may, however, take the words "her sins are forgiven" as spoken in the same sense in which the priest pronounces absolution over a penitent, who is already reconciled to God by his perfect repentance. The priest absolves him who is already absolved, and this absolution is so effectual as to do away with any sin which might still attach itself to the penitent. Further, a sin often repeated may be often forgiven, if the penitent confesses his fault as often as he commits it, and seeks absolution at the hands of the Church. Hence Christ for the third time forgives the sins of the Magdalene. Wherefore He freed her not only from the guilt but from the punishment of sin, and granted her free release.

This is what the angel said to a certain Bishop of the Church: Penitence and confession restore the penitent to the number of the elect." Again, "The tears of a penitent may well bear the name of a baptism." Barlaam. And Palladius tells us, that a certain virgin who had fallen into sin "was more pleasing to God in her penitence, than in her former purity." See also S. Jerome (*De pœnitentia Fabiolæ*); and Climacus (*De pœnitentia*.)

For she loved much. Toletus and some others think that the word "for" signifies not the cause but rather affords the proof of her forgiveness. "Thou mightest have known, O Simon, that her sins were forgiven, for these open signs of love are bestowed on Me in gratitude for my forgiveness of her sins."

But this explanation is faulty, because the Magdalene knew not that she had been forgiven, until she heard Christ pronounce the pardon of her sins. And Christ does not say, Learn from her acts of love that her sins have been forgiven, but on the contrary,

Her sins are forgiven because of her love.

Hence the cause of the Magdalene's forgiveness was her great love for God, which led her to hate and abhor her former sins. For love is the death of sin, and the life of righteousness. S. Augustine (*De laudibus charitatis*.) Hence all theologians hold with him, that the act or perfect contrition which includes the entire surrender of the heart to God, precedes, but at once brings with it justification and forgiveness of sin as its final result, in the same way as a certain amount of heat (*calor ut octo*) applied to wood, as a result produces actual fire in that wood.

So the Council of Trent (*Sess. xiv. cap. iv.*), distinguishig between the attrition caused by fear of punishment and the contrition which follows on the love of God, decides that the latter, in conjunction with the sacrament of penance, reconciles the sinner with God, which the former is in no wise able to do; for "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise," Ps. li. 17. Hence S. Gregory (*Hom. 33*) explains, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much, *i.e.* she burnt off the corruptions of sin, because she was inflamed with the fire of love. For the more the heart of the sinner burns with the love of God the more is he purified from the lust and corruption of sin."

*But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* This refers to the Pharisee, because he obtained no forgiveness, inasmuch as he showed no signs of penitence or of love for God. Our Lord, under reserve, saith little or "less," as the Vulgate renders it, is forgiven, though he might have said "nothing" is forgiven. But by the words "to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little," we may understand:

1. That, according to the principles on which God forgives sins, "one mortal sin, even though it be the least, cannot be forgiven without its accompanying sins being forgiven also, and whensoever one is forgiven, the others are forgiven as far as the guilt is concerned, but more or less of punishment is meted out, according to the degree of love which fills the heart of the penitent."
2. That he who has no love for God, or only that natural love which well nigh all men possess, loves God less than one whose love is divinely inspired. Hence to the one many, *i.e.* all his sins, are pardoned; to the other less, *i.e.* nothing, is forgiven. All was forgiven the Magdalene because she was truly contrite, and sought forgiveness by every means in her power; but the Pharisee received no forgiveness, because he felt no sorrow for sin, and had not even given the feast with any desire of obtaining mercy from Christ..

For Christ designed the parable to apply to S. Mary Magdalene and also to the Pharisee, and willed from it to show why the one was forgiven but the other not. S. Augustine adds, "The parable was spoken because the