

**SERMON - 5th Sunday of Lent - On the woman with the alabaster jar of ointment,
April 14, 2019
Luke 7:36-50 (St. Mary of Egypt)**

God loves us more than we will ever know. God's love fills our hearts with divine light and indescribable joy. God suffers and grieves for us, and we can feel this in our souls, and this draws us closer to Him. The woman with the alabaster jar of ointment is drawn to Christ because of His all powerful love and care for her. If we imitate Christ in His love for others, then others will be drawn to us and love us as well. The Pharisee Simon has no love in his heart. He judges the woman, feels disgust towards her, and labels her a "sinner." The woman knows that she has sinned, but Christ's love for her is so overwhelming that her shame is taken away and she boldly enters the house of Simon the Pharisee in order to show adoration to the One who loves her so much and does not judge and condemn her for her sins. It takes great faith and humility for this woman to overcome her shame and come to the Lord in front of others who are hostile and would humiliate and judge her. Simon may in a legalistic sense have not sinned as this woman, but Simon is filled with pride. The greatest sin of the Devil is pride, and Simon resembles the Devil, whereas the woman is God-like, in spite of her sins, because she acknowledges her weaknesses and has faith, love and humility. Simon has no joy, and probably wears a frown and never smiles. The woman shines and radiates with joy and happiness because God's love has filled her. God's love lifts her up, and love, not judgement and condemnation, brings the sinner to repentance and a God-like way of life. If we accept Christ in our hearts, then all problems disappear along with all delusions and worries; then sin departs as well. Humility is essential for our salvation. If a person is to change, the grace of God must come, but in order for the grace of God to come, man must be humbled. Man struggles with sin and the passions, but God's love is like an oasis that gives us rest, comfort and the strength to conquer sin. St. Paul tells us that "**Love** is patient, **love** is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **Love** does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). The Lord loves Simon too, but it is not possible for Simon to receive God's love in his heart as long as he is filled with pride and judges others. If Simon were to change his attitude and feel love and concern for others, then the door of his heart would open and be able to receive God's grace and love. Being a Christian means that we love Christ and all of God's creation: the animals, trees, flowers, birds and, above all, the most perfect of God's creation, man. The only thing that Simon loves is himself. In today's Gospel it says about the sinful woman that *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much* (Luke 7:47). Here, Brothers and Sisters, is the key to the forgiveness of sins and how we can change our lives. The sinful woman didn't say a word, she only *acted*. Her actions spoke much louder than any long speeches or eloquent phrases. It is not words that the Lord seeks, but *deeds*. We too can show love and adoration for the Lord the same as this woman. Didn't Jesus say that "If you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40)? We receive the forgiveness of our sins and become God-like when we help the needy, when we feed the hungry, when we give shelter to the homeless, when we comfort those who sorrow and grieve, when we show love and concern for others not by just talking about it but by *doing* something about it, by our actions and showing acts of love, mercy and kindness. When we do these things we imitate the woman in today's Gospel and it is we who are pouring ointment on the Lord's feet and kissing and washing His feet. St. Theophan the Recluse says that we should "anoint the invisible Lord with loving prayer of the heart and mind, and for His sake do everything possible for the needy, and you will be doing this for God." May God help us to imitate the love and humility of the sinful woman and thereby be forgiven our sins and find our salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory, honor and worship, now and forever, and unto ages of ages, Amen!