

British historian and politician Thomas McCauley (1800-1859) once described integrity as the measure of a good person who does the right thing, even when no one else would know whether they did it or not. Stephen R. Covey, author of *Everyday Greatness*, says that the people with integrity are those whose words match their deeds and whose behaviors mirror their values. In his book, he tells the story of a father and son fishing alone late one night in the middle of a lake up in New Hampshire. They had caught several perch and sunfish, when all of a sudden, the son hooked on to the biggest bass either of them had ever seen. As the boy wrestled the fish into the boat, his father lit a match and looked at his watch; it was 10:00 p.m. The bass season did not open until midnight. “Son,” he said, “you have to put it back.” Even though the boy objected, and no one else would ever have known, the father insisted. To this day, 34 years later, the son remembers that fish – every time he comes up against a question of ethics. His memory of that great catch inspired him to choose the path of integrity in all his dealings with others.

Today’s readings are all about the gratuitous forgiveness available to us from the Lord. Integrity – seeing ourselves as we really are, truthfully acknowledging our sinfulness – is the first step toward forgiveness, and it’s so important that, without it, there’s no forgiveness.

In today's first reading, David proved that he had that kind of integrity and humility.

The prophet Nathan, acting like an external conscience to David, brought up to him how he had spurned the Lord and done evil when he had Uriah killed, and took Uriah's wife as his own. David could have ignored Nathan; he had the power to silence him by having him dispatched; he could have denied what he did, and hidden behind the excuse that his royal power set him above the law. But he didn't. He admitted that he was guilty, "I have sinned against the Lord;" atoned for his sin, and was forgiven.

Paul, the author of today's second reading, was also a man of that kind of integrity and truthfulness. Whenever he talked about his life (as he did to the Galatians, the Corinthians, the Philippians), he always began by saying what a faithful Jew he was, and then went on to talk about his conversion; he never denied or shied away from admitting what he had done to those first Christians like Stephen. He acknowledged what he had done, atoned for his sins, and was forgiven.

Although she did not utter a word, the actions of the sinful woman in today's gospel speak eloquently of her integrity and humility. Assuming the role of servant before Jesus, she did not defend herself or claim innocence. Her tears told of her guilt and remorse; her anointing of the feet of Jesus expressed her desire for healing and forgiveness. Jesus forgave her and praised her great love and faith. In Sacred Scripture, only two people are recorded as having kissed Jesus. One was Judas, who kissed Jesus to betray him; and the other was this woman, who kissed Jesus in order to find his love and

forgiveness. She acknowledged who she was, atoned for her sins, and received forgiveness.

In today's world it's so easy to put forward a false front, to hide behind a computer name or an Internet address, to mask our true selves, to get away with almost anything. God's word today calls in the opposite direction: it calls us to make our words match our deeds, and our behaviors mirror our values. It calls us to integrity and to honesty; and to repentance when we fail.