Simon the Pharisee
(From Conversation with God, Fernandez Carvajal)

We read in today's Gospel that Jesus was invited for a meal by a Pharisee named Simon. We are not told where it was, but in all likelihood it was somewhere in Galilee, perhaps in Capharnaum. Simon showed no special love for Jesus, for he did not even take the trouble to show him the normal courtesy of the times: a kiss of welcome, perfumed water for washing, ointment.

When Jesus was seated at table a woman made her way in and went directly towards him. She was a woman of the city and a sinner. She must have known our Lord and perhaps have been struck at some time by his words or gestures of mercy. Today she decided she wanted to meet him personally. And she showed many signs of repentance and contrition. She brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. We know what was going on in her heart because of what Jesus said afterwards: She loved much. She showed how great her respect for Jesus was. She forgot about the others who were present and about herself. She was only interested in Jesus.

Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. That's the reason for so much pardon. The scene ends with our Lord's consoling words: Your faith has saved you; go in peace. Begin again your life, with new hope. Peace always comes when there is deep contrition. Go in peace. These are the very words the priest says to us after forgiving us our sins. Faith and humility saved that woman; with contrition she began a new life. As St Gregory the Great says: That woman represents us when, after having committed a sin, we turn back to God with all our heart and imitate her in our cries of penance. Contrition makes us forget ourselves and return to God through a deep act of love. Contrition is also a sign of the depth of our love and calls down God's mercy upon us. As the prophet Isaiah says: This is the man to whom I will look he that is humble and contrite in spirit. Our worst defects and failings ought not dishearten us, even if they are many and frequent, provided we are humble and repentant.

Let us ask God to engrave on our hearts this consoling teaching so that we continue our effort to be holy and reach God's love. In this adventure of love we should not be depressed by our falls, not even by serious falls, if we go to God in the sacrament of penance, contrite and resolved to improve. A Christian is not a neurotic collector of good behaviour reports. Jesus Christ our Lord was moved as much by Peter's repentance after his fall as by John's innocence and faithfulness. Jesus understands our weaknesses and draws us to himself on an inclined plane. He wants us to make an effort to climb a little each day. He seeks us out, just as He did the disciples of Emmaus, whom He went out to meet. He sought Thomas, showed himself to him and made him touch with his fingers the open wounds in his hands and side. Jesus Christ is always waiting for us to return to him; He knows our weaknesses.