

Scripture Study

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C



Opening prayer

Sirach 35:12-14,16-18

(Ps 34:2-3,17-19,23)

2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18

Luke 18:9-14

Overview of the Gospel:

- Jesus continues his teaching on prayer from last Sunday's gospel (Luke 18:1-8).
- Two opposite types are presented here. Pharisees were respected as meticulous interpreters and keepers of the law. Furthermore, by their code of "separateness," especially regarding non-Jews, they were admired as non-compromisers with the occupying Romans (Pharisee is from the Hebrew *perushim*—"separated ones").
- Tax collectors, on the other hand, were often dishonest and were considered collaborators with the Romans besides. They were often mentioned in the same breath as "other sinners" (Luke 5:27-32, 19:7; Matthew 18:17).
- As he often does, Jesus turns the assumptions of his listeners completely around. The prayer of the "holy" Pharisee accomplishes two things: it focuses on himself as the center of his prayer, and leads him to despise others. The prayer of the tax collector, however, is a prayer of humility and dependence on God (Psalm 51:1-4; Daniel 9:18; CCC 2559, 2839). Jesus points out only one "went home justified."

Questions:

- In the First Reading, the writer lists roughly five types of people whose prayer the Lord is especially attentive to: who are they? Do you—or could you—fit into any of these categories?
- In the Second Reading, despite his hardships and disappointments, to what is St. Paul looking forward to? In what (and in whom) does he place his confidence?
- In the Gospel reading, to whom did Jesus direct his parable?
- What group of people would be the Pharisees today? The tax collectors? What would be the "Pharisee's prayer?"
- Why might it be dangerous to compare your practice of the faith to that of others?
- How does this parable complement the one we heard last week on persistence (vv 1-8)? How do both demonstrate faith?
- When have you been like the Pharisee? The tax collector? What accounts for the difference?
- *Right now*, knowing your attitude toward others, who are you most like?
- How do you walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8. See 1 Peter 5:5; James 4:6)?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 2559, 2513, 588, 2631, 2667, 2839

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!

For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart; it is a simple glance directed to Heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy. Finally, it is something great and supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus. —St. Therese of Lisieux

"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled"

Scripture: *Luke 18:9-14*

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Meditation: What kind of prayer is pleasing to God? Jesus told a vivid story of two people who went to the house of God to pray. Why did the Lord accept one person's prayer and reject the other's prayer? Luke gives us a hint: despising one's neighbor closes the door to God's heart. Contempt is more than being mean-minded. It springs from the assumption that one is qualified to sit in the seat of judgment and to ascertain who is good and just.



Jesus' story caused offense for those who regarded "tax collectors" as unworthy of God's grace and favor. How could Jesus put down a "religious leader" and raise up a "public sinner"? Jesus' parable speaks about the nature of prayer and our relationship with God. It does this by contrasting two very different attitudes towards prayer. The Pharisee, who represented those who take pride in their religious practices, exalted himself at the expense of others. Absorbed with his own sense of self-satisfaction and self-congratulation he mainly prayed with himself. His prayer consisted of prideful boasts of what he did and of disdain for those he despised. The Pharisee tried to justify himself; but only God can justify. The tax collector, who represented those despised by

religious people, humbled himself before God and begged for mercy. His prayer was heard by God because he had remorse for his sins. He sought God with humility rather than with pride.

This parable presents both an opportunity and a warning. Pride leads to illusion and self-deception. Humility helps us to see ourselves as we really are and it inclines us to God's grace and mercy. God dwells with the humble of heart who recognize their own sinfulness and who acknowledge God's mercy and saving grace. *I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit* (Isaiah 57:15). God cannot hear us if we despise others. Do you humbly seek God's mercy and do you show mercy to others, especially those you find difficult to love and to forgive?

"Lord, may your love direct all my thoughts and actions that I may do what is pleasing to you. Show me where I lack charity and forgiveness toward my neighbor and help me to be generous in giving to others what you have so generously given to me."

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