



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

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'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' Luke 18:13

This reading continues Jesus' teaching from last Sunday on prayer. Today's parable contrasts two men who come to the temple to pray.

The first man, a Pharisee, believes he has avoided sin. He has fasted twice a week. (Pharisees fasted even from water on Mondays and Thursdays.) He tithes not only on his produce, as required, but on all his wealth. In short, he has done more than the law mandates.

The tax collector, on the other hand, has no good works to claim. He is a sinner where an inner crisis has raised his awareness of his sinful state.

After describing the two men, Jesus confounds his hearers' expectations. Jesus tells us that the Pharisee has done it wrong while the tax collector, the "sinner," is pronounced justified.

Only one type of prayer results in justification, the proper humble disposition of the self in right relationship with God and neighbor. This point is signaled at the beginning and at the end of the story. Jesus told the parable to those who were convinced of their self-righteousness. Jesus' exhortation insists that such prideful self-exaltation will lead ultimately to downfall.

All those who take religion seriously face this temptation of the Pharisee. It is so easy to begin to think of our efforts as justifying ourselves before God. But justification, which leads to salvation, is always God's free gift. We cannot earn it; we do not deserve it; so we are never in a position to look down on anyone else.

Often the weight on our heart from a crisis in life leads to a humbling that comes from the self-realization of one's sin. Confession and spiritual direction leads us to realize that mortal sin is not death for us, but rather an opportunity for what St. Paul calls "*metanoia*," the liberating conversion of mind and behavior. This opens our spiritual channel for the reception and healing of the mercy of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. From that glorious day of redemption forward we see this as a new way of praying, arising from a consciousness of dependency on God in solidarity with our Christian Community.

This week, reflect on this text through the lens of humility. When you pray, do you speak from the height of your pride and will, or sincerely from a humble and contrite heart? "*He who humbles himself will be exalted.*" Is humility the foundation of your prayer? Only when we humbly acknowledge that "*we do not know how to pray as we ought,*" are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. "*Man is a beggar before God.*" Cf CCC 2559

Reflecting on this parable can remind us that any goodness we have is a gift from God. And humility is the only proper disposition for any of us creatures before God.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Jesus told this parable
to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous,
and regarded others with contempt:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray,
one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus,
'God, I thank you that I am not like other people:
Greedy, dishonest, adulterers,
or even like this tax collector.
I fast twice a week;
And pay tithes on all my income.'”

"But the tax collector, standing far off,
would not even look up to heaven,
but was beating his breast and saying,
'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'"

"I tell you,
this man went down to his home justified rather than the other;
for all who exalt themselves will be humbled,
but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

The Gospel of the Lord

