



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

October 23, 2022

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The main theme of today's Gospel is that true humility and repentance for our sins must be the hallmark of our prayers. However, the central focus of today's parable is not on prayer itself, but rather on the evil of pride, the need for true humility, and the role of God's grace in our salvation. The first reading, taken from Sirach, is a perfect companion piece to the Gospel parable. In one striking image from Sirach, the writer declares, "the prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds to reach the unseen throne of God." Such prayers are heard because they come from the hearts of people who know how much they need God. Although God has no favorites and answers the prayers of all, the oppressed, the orphans, the widows, and those who can least help themselves are His special concern. The best prayer is humble and selfless service.

The Gospel parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus reminds us that God hears the prayers those who approach Him in humility. God did not hear the prayer of this Pharisee because he exalted himself. His prayer was a prayer of thanksgiving that he was not as evil as other people; He believed in himself only as he announced to God his freedom from sin and detailed his fidelity in observing the prescribed fasts and in giving tithes. This tax collector's prayer, "*O God, be merciful to me, a sinner,*" was heard because he humbled himself acknowledging his sins and requesting God's mercy.

This parable has a two-fold meaning, giving us a warning against pride and contempt for others. We are not to think that we are better than our fellow sisters and brothers; we must have a sincerity to approach God with a humble and repentant heart. The parable was mainly intended to convict the Pharisees who, on the one hand, proudly claimed they obeyed all the rules and regulations of the Jewish Law, while on the other hand, they ignored the Mosaic precepts of mercy and compassion. They were as Jesus told them earlier in the scripture put more emphasis on keeping the law than instructing the people as they were tasked to do. Selfish and centered behavior can be damaging to our relationship with God and mankind.

These Pharisees were looked upon as devout, law-abiding citizens and models of righteousness. But they were proud and self-righteous. The tax collectors, on the other hand, were the most-hated group in Israel because they collected taxes for a foreign empire and became rich by cheating people, often threatening them with false accusations. In other words, they collaborated with the Romans and stole from the Jews. Hence, they were considered by their fellow-Jews to be traitors, unclean, and sinful. The parable, however, shows that both men were sinners: the difference was that the publican realized, acknowledged, and repented of his sins, but the Pharisee did none of these. The lesson is one of being repentant for our sinfulness. God knows our hearts and our habits and can show us mercy when we are humble enough to approach him in sincerity and sorrow for our sins, seeking constantly his love and mercy to restore us.