

October 23, 2022

Being Humble as the Trademark of Christian Life (30th Sunday in Ordinary Time)

Gospel of Luke 18:9-14

Fr. Oliver

A news reporter once asked St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) if she had ever been tempted to be proud. Mother Theresa retorted with a smile, "Proud about what?" The reporter replied, "Why, about the wonderful things you have been doing for the poorest of the poor!" Then came her answer, "I never knew I had done anything, because it was God who worked in and through my Sisters and volunteers." True humility differentiates a saint from a sinner. If we are proud of our talents, our family connections, our reputation, or our achievements in life, today's Gospel tells us that we need Jesus to rid us of our pride and make us truly humble. 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 favourites 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.

In the second reading, Paul celebrates the fact that he is near the finish line of his life, like a runner running a race, and that he has kept the Faith right up to this point. He humbly awaits "the crown of righteousness" that only God can give him. *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the Faith!"*

In today's 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 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.

Muhammad Ali had just won another boxing title. He used to boast: "When you are great and famous like me, it is hard to be humble." Once, on an airplane, the stewardess politely said to him, "Sir, you need to fasten your seat belt." Ali replied, "Superman doesn't need a seat belt." — To which the stewardess politely responded, "And Superman doesn't need an airplane either; please fasten your seat belt, Sir."

Luke's Gospel shows special concern for the poor and the outsider. Luke may have included the parable we hear today, which concerns the acceptability of the prayers of the humble publican as opposed to those of the proud Pharisee, at least in part, to encourage the Gentile converts who did not practice the Jewish Law as the

Pharisees did. In this parable, we see that God values the prayer of any humble and contrite heart. Luke puts greater emphasis on prayer than do the other Gospel writers, and he often mentions Jesus' prayers (Lk 3:21; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28, 29; 11:1). The parables about prayer unique to Luke's Gospel are: 1) The Friend at Midnight (11:5-8), 2) The Widow and the Unjust Judge (18:1-8), and 3) The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14). These parables teach us to pray persistently, and humbly. The central focus of today's parable is not on prayer, but rather on the danger of pride, the necessity for humility, and the role of grace in our salvation.

The parable has a two-fold meaning, giving us i) a warning against pride and contempt for others, and ii) an admonition 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. The 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.

Today over one billion Catholics all over the world observe *World Mission Sunday*. This annual observance was instituted 96 years ago in 1926 by Pope Pius XI's Papal decree. Every year since then, the universal Church has dedicated the month of October to reflection on, and prayer for the missions. On World Mission Sunday, Catholics gather to celebrate the Eucharist and to contribute to a collection for the work of evangelization around the world. This annual celebration gives us a chance to reflect on the importance of mission work for the life of the Church. It reminds us that we are one with the Church around the world and that we are all committed to carrying on the mission of Christ, however different our situations may be.

Today we also remember the CWL group for their amazing and commendable works that they are engaged in for the good of the parish and for the upliftment of the Canadian society. 75 years of existence and service! That is fabulous! This celebration may be an eye-opener for others to join with this group shoulder to shoulder in establishing the kingdom of God being an enjoyable and visible reality in the church and society. My heartfelt congrats to all of them. Let us keep them all and their meritorious services in our prayers.