

Reflection on the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

1st Reading: *Sirach 35:12–14, 16-18*

Sirach is one of the wisdom books of the Hebrew people. Our selection today is from a section wherein the author is telling the people that living the law, doing works of charity and refraining from evil and injustice is sacrifice. He is telling the people to live their sacrifice out in their day-to-day lives not just to offer it at the altar. The small portion we have today shows God's attitude toward the poor and is probably connected to the Gospel as a contrast to the attitude of the Pharisee.

2nd Reading: *2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16-18*

This is the last selection we'll have from the 2nd Letter to Timothy. It is toward the end of the letter and interestingly it is connected to the Gospel in the contrast it shows between Paul's attitude and the Pharisee's. Paul is confident that he is saved because of his faith in the Lord; the Pharisee is confident, as you will hear, because of his own works.

Gospel: *Luke 18:9–14*

“...everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Lk 18:14b

This is another one of those Gospel stories that tells us that we can't earn our way into heaven. Look at the Pharisee in this story. He follows the law and he goes beyond the law by fasting and paying tithes on absolutely all of his income. But, he is not the one Jesus considered righteous! He evidently thought he was righteous and thought his works would gain him God's respect. The Pharisee is demonstrating what we call self-righteousness which never does us any good.

The tax collector, on the other hand, demonstrates humility for us. But notice something about his humility. It is not false humility. He is owning up to the truth about who he is. He, like all of us, is a sinner and he is asking God's mercy as a sinner. His asking, I think, implies faith, faith that God will show him mercy.

False humility is pretending to be less than another. I think it is just as bad as self-righteousness because it is often accompanied by the inner thought that we are better than the one to whom we are giving deference. Neither situation is claiming the truth of who we are.

Humility begins, I think, in our relationship with God. It begins with the acceptance of the truth that He is the creator and we are the creatures. It recognizes that all our good qualities, traits and talents are gifts from God, gifts that are given us to be used for His purposes. Responding to the giver of all good

gifts by developing those qualities, traits and talents, in humility, is, I think, the most basic form of prayer. He gives, we respond.

God is the giver of all “good” gifts. When we misuse those gifts or develop bad personality traits out of the good traits He gave us, that’s sin. That is why the tax collector was asking mercy God’s mercy. He recognized and accepted the fact that he misused God’s gifts, we would assume for his own selfish purposes. But he is the one justified, the one who owned up to the fact of his own imperfections and asked God’s mercy.

I don’t know how often the tax collector went to the temple to ask God’s mercy but the Church recommends that we do it on a regular basis through the sacrament of Reconciliation. If your excuse is that you don’t have any bad sins, then I suggest you are getting close to what the Pharisee was doing. Don’t think the confessional is about cleansing yourself of bad sins so God has to let you into heaven.

The sacrament of Reconciliation is about humbly embracing the truth about who we are. It is about reflection upon the skills, talents and personality traits God has given us and how we have selfishly misused those gifts and/or used them against others. It is only through this reflection and acceptance that we can grow into a better version of the person God created us to be. Remember, He is the creator and we are the creatures, but He has wondrously allowed us to enter into that creative process with Him.

And, by the way, the Church in its wisdom has suggested that the prayer of the tax collector might be an appropriate substitute for the Act of Contrition used in Reconciliation. It has updated it to “Lord Jesus, son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Some people like to end their list of sins this way instead of saying “I’m sorry for these and all the sins of my past life...”

Reflection

“But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’¹⁴ I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former...” Lk 18:13-14a

Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Share about/Reflect upon the skills, talents and personality traits God has given you. How has God benefited from your use of those gifts? How have you benefited from them and where do they cause you problems? What can you do to help you use those gifts, in the future, more for God’s purposes?

Verse by Verse:

Lk 18:9a "...those who were convinced of their own righteousness..." | This comment is not saying that all Pharisees are in this group but the particular Pharisee is a representative of a group of self-righteous people.

Lk 18:9b "...and despised everyone else." | This is a strong statement. The Greek actually does mean "and despised **everyone** else." This is more than despising some others.

Lk 18:10 "...the other was a tax collector" | Tax collectors were often associated with sinners because they collected taxes for the Romans and handled Roman money which had the image of the emperor, considered a god, on it.

Lk 18:11 "The Pharisee took up his position" | Literally translated the phrase means *took up his stance*. Luke, but none of the other evangelists, uses this phrase, usually before something of importance is said.

Lk 18:11 "spoke this prayer to himself" | This simply means silently, not out loud.