

30th Sunday in the Ordinary Time C
The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; Psalm. 34:2-3,17-18,19,23; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

Dear brothers and sisters,

"The Lord hears the cry of the poor" (Psalm 34:7). The poor and lowly ones are at the center of the heart of God. God has big ears and a heart when the poor cry out to him. He hears and answers their cries, tears, and pains in due time and sometimes in ways we least expect.

When was the last time you cried to God in prayer like a poor person? To be poor is to recognize our helplessness and to have nothing to turn to except God.

The passage from the Book of Sirach proclaims that God listens to the grievances of the poor and does not forsake their cries. It assures us that God will render justice and show no partiality to them (cf. 35:16-18). St. Paul echoes a similar assurance: a conviction that God stands by him and gives the reward that a good and a poor servant deserves (cf. 2 Tim. 4:17-18). This makes him resilient despite being abandoned by his collaborators and treated as a criminal because of the Gospel. And even though he becomes poor because of his ministry, he's resolute to continue serving to the end—fighting the good fight, running the race, keeping the faith (cf. 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Our Lord Jesus reinforces this message through the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Both went to the temple to pray, but it's the Tax Collector who wins God's favor because of his profound humility. The Pharisee, a devout observer of the Law, leads a life of regular prayer, tithing, and fasting. One might assume he would easily please God, but Jesus rebukes him for his prayer that reveals self-righteousness. The Pharisee says, "O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity – greedy, dishonest, adulterous – or even like this tax collector" (Lk. 18:11). He presents himself to God as someone who does not need his mercy, his sense of justice and self-righteousness leading him to despise others and arrogantly separate himself from the rest of humanity.

In contrast, the Tax Collector, a declared public sinner with no moral integrity due to his status, knows that he is undeserving and has no self-justice to boast about. He enters the temple with his head bowed down, so in-touched with his unworthiness, begging the Lord for something he cannot give to himself: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk. 18:13). His prayer has nothing to prove before God except his dire need for mercy. Because he genuinely humbles himself, God approves his prayer, and he goes home justified.

When we pray with a spirit of humility, like someone who is poor—without expecting an answer based on our many prayers or good deeds—but instead waiting patiently, God is pleased to accept our prayers. In prayer, we should not approach with a sense of self-sufficiency. Instead, we present ourselves before God, fully aware of our weaknesses. We have nothing to boast about and nothing to prove except our need for mercy. Such a humble prayer pierces the heavens and effectively reaches its goal: receiving God's mercy (cf. Sir 35:21). Only when we humble ourselves, acknowledge our unworthiness, and surrender to God's will can we return home justified; His mercy is then bestowed upon us.

Let us keep in mind that our prayer, no matter how intimate our encounter with God's mercy is, will be rendered empty if it doesn't lead us to the practice of charity. Prayer should not remain within us; we are not just recipients of mercy like collectible spiritual items to store up. It is meant to go out to others, especially to the poor and needy. We are called to be active channels of mercy, the living presence of God's love and compassion to all we encounter! Prayer attains its goal when it is followed by our charity to the poor, making it a lived reality, as demonstrated by the saints.

In just a few days, we will celebrate All Saints Day. This occasion reminds us of our divine call to holiness. The Church teaches that all baptized individuals are called to lead a life of holiness (cf. LG, #39). Sainthood is not a privilege reserved for a select few; it is a path available to everyone who believes in Christ. The saints were ordinary people who, through their humility, endeavored to follow the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, especially his life of loving service to those in need. Let their example inspire us to understand that holiness is not a distant goal, but a present reality within our reach, to be lived out with humility and love.

Let us not forget that God has given us the internal capacity to live a holy life through the gift of the Sacrament of Baptism and nourished through our communion with the Body of Christ. Our challenge is to eliminate self-importance, surrender our pride to God, refrain from placing undue burdens on others, and make an everyday decision to live out the gift of holiness with joy and gratitude. And we should not be ashamed to say, "I want to be a saint."

Of course, holiness is a gift from God, embracing this gift is to intentionally practice the cardinal virtues: fortitude (to endure for the benefit of others), prudence (to exercise caution and discernment in our words and actions), justice (to treat others equitably and justly), and temperance (to live a life marked by self-restraint, especially concerning material accumulation). These virtues are called "cardinal" because they serve as foundational principles for all other virtues.

While God hears the cries of the poor, being poor is not an end in itself; rather, it is meant to be the leaven for a life of holiness and active involvement in God's mercy for others and the whole creation.

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