

Homily for the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

A Jewish rabbi became seriously ill, so the Jewish community declared a day of fasting and prayer for his recovery. When the entire village was gathered in the synagogue for fasting and prayer, the village drunkard went to the village tavern for some schnapps (white brandy). Another Jew saw him and rebuked him saying, “Don’t you know this is a fast-day and everyone is in the synagogue praying for the healing of our rabbi? You shouldn’t be drinking.” The drunkard agreed, went to the synagogue and prayed, “*Dear God! Please restore our rabbi to good health so that I can have my schnapps!*”

The rabbi recovered, and his healing was seen to be granted because of the sincere prayer of the drunkard. Addressing his people on the following Sabbath, the rabbi prayed: “May God preserve our village drunkard until he is a hundred and twenty years old. And he looked at the people and said “Know that his prayer was heard by God when yours were not heard by God, because he put his whole heart and soul into his prayer!” Today’s Gospel tells us how God heard the prayers of a humble sinner and ignored the proud prayer of a self-righteous.

This Sunday the readings teach us *that true prayer and holiness come from humility, not pride or appearance.*

We heard from the first reading from the Book of Sirach. Around 175 BC, many Jews living in mostly pagan cities were starting to assimilate their culture and values. Hence Sirach, a wise Jew, reminded them how to live faithfully and *making good moral and spiritual choices and behaving honorably as people devoted to God.*

In this passage, Sirach says that the *just God has no favorites*. Rather, He always hears and grants the humble prayers of the widows, the orphans, the lowly, the weak and the oppressed.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells the well-known parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. This parable speaks about two contrasting attitudes: pride and humility. The Pharisee represents the attitude of pride, while the tax collector represents the attitude of humility. Last Sunday, the Gospel spoke about perseverance in prayer.

This week, Jesus teaches us another important aspect of prayer, *to pray with humility*.

The Pharisee stands before God, all proud of himself, thanking God that he is not like the rest of the people. He bragged about how he fulfills his commitment to God and the Temple by fasting and giving a tenth of his income. In those days, the Pharisees abstained from food and water every Monday and Thursday.

Other legitimate criticisms are he was proud, arrogant and condescending; he was lacking in self-knowledge because he was completely out of touch with his own failings and sins; he was also judgmental, in the sense that he not only condemned evil actions which we are supposed to do; he also condemned other people by pretending to know what was in their hearts which is what we must never do.

Overall, The **Pharisee** represents the danger of **spiritual pride**, trusting in his own goodness instead of God's grace. Jesus uses his character to teach that **humility, not self-righteousness, leads to justification before God**.

Then comes the second character, *the Tax Collector*. The tax collector was generally looked down upon by the people and regarded as a man of low moral standards, because he worked for the pagan Romans, mixed up with them and constantly handled their unclean money. He was considered a public sinner, traitor and thief on the highway to hell. He was adept at defrauding people through various coercive methods and was regarded as not better than a robber.

(For Example, in the gospel of the Luke 19:1-10 we read the story of Zacchaeus. This passage tells how the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus. When **Jesus invited Zacchaeus** to come down from the tree, saying that He **wanted to stay at his house**, the people around reacted **negatively**. When the crowd saw this, they all began to grumble, saying, 'He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.' The crowd was **shocked and displeased**. Because Zacchaeus was a **tax collector**, seen as a **sinner and traitor** because he worked for the Romans and often cheated people. The people could not understand why **a holy teacher like Jesus** would choose to associate with someone they despised. Their reaction shows how **human judgment** often contrasts with **God's mercy** while the crowd saw only a sinner, **Jesus saw a soul ready for conversion**.)

This tax collector in today's gospel, standing far off, simply beats his chest and says, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*" The **tax collector represents humility, repentance, and reliance on God's mercy.**

What is the central message of the parable? Prayer that flows from *pride, arrogance and self-righteousness will always be rejected by God.* **"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble"** (James 4:6; Proverbs 3:34). While prayer that flows from *sincerity, humility and repentance will always be acceptable, pleasing and holy to the Lord.* It is important to note that prayer without humility is not prayer at all.

Today, let us reflect on our own lives: *Are our prayers and actions rooted in humility and sincerity, or in pride and self-importance?* God does not measure us by how we appear to others, but by the humility and truth of our hearts. Let us, like the tax collector, *approach God with honesty, repentance, and trust, knowing that it is in humble hearts that God's grace is poured out most abundantly.* May God bless all of us. Amen.