

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time October 26, 2025

The Book of Sirach provides a short catechesis on prayer and in particular, the state that one's soul must in in prayer. And we hear that the *“Lord hears that the cry of the oppressed, the wail of the orphan, the complaint of the widow, and these prayers we are told, reach the heavens. They pierce the clouds.”*

Today we hear Christ’s Parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, and the Pharisee was a deeply religious man, and in many ways, he is doing everything right. He fasted like a faithful Jew on Monday and Thursday. He gave ten percent of his income to the Temple. He was not greedy, he was not dishonest, he was not adulterous. There he is in the temple praying. This man was deeply religious.

We have a tax collector. The tax collector, on the other hand, was the Israelite associated with fraudulent practices. You will remember that the Romans occupied first century Palestine and tax collectors were hired in order to levy taxes from people and give those taxes to the Roman authorities. The Jews didn't want the Romans there. So, fellow Jews who were working for the Romans were seen as traitors. At the same time, these tax collectors would often take more than what was their due and the Jews had no recourse. The Romans didn't care. They just wanted their taxes. So, tax collectors were seen as traitors and thieves. They were despised. So, it really puts into perspective on that Christ Jesus called a tax collector, St. Matthew, to be an apostle.

So, in the temple, you have now a deeply religious man, and you have essentially a traitor and thief. And this is the Parable: The Pharisee seemed to express his gratitude, but his gratitude quickly turns into judgment. The Pharisee reveals that he knows what is going on in the inner sanctuary of the tax collector’s heart.

Meanwhile, the tax collector - what is he doing? He is it acknowledging his sin and he has humbled himself. He is begging the Lord for mercy. And in Christ's admonition, the tax collector, went home justified, not the Pharisee. This Parable as Jesus spoke it must have cause quite a stir amongst the Pharisees and the Scribes. And I think it is meant to invite us now today to further reflection.

Like the Pharisee and the tax collector, we have come to worship Almighty God. We might ask, well, which one are we? Am I the Pharisee or am I the tax collector? I think we could go deeper because the reality is - I'm speaking from my own experience - I don't know you personally, but as I look at my own heart, I think we're a mixture of both: of both the Pharisee and the tax collector. At times, we're really proud of ourselves, but our pride comes at the expense of the other. "At least I'm not like that guy." But then we find ourselves on our knees begging the Lord to hear us. The Pharisee, the tax collector, but then we cast judgment upon others, purporting to know precisely what their motives are. And then at other times, we find ourselves giving someone a benevolent benefit of the doubt. Again, we are like the Pharisee and the tax collector, a mixture of both.

Casting judgment – our blessed Lord says, *"Judge not lest you be judged. Condemn not lest you be condemned. But the same measure with which you judge will be measured out to you."* These are words that Christ Jesus spoke. Jesus Christ is the God Man; God spoke these words. God became man, and He spoke these words. They are important. They are vital. Our salvation depends on them. Casting judgment always involves putting the other down in order to build ourselves up. So, why do we judge others? Perhaps we're dissolving something within ourselves that we don't want to acknowledge. It's too painful to look at.

How do we overcome this vice of judging others? I think it rests on seeing the world as it truly is. Seeing things from God's perspective. Now, this is a great mystery who are we to say, "I am going to look at these things from God's perspective." But let's think for a moment theologically: if God is love, if God created out of love, think of this world, the cosmos, all that is. God so loved the world we hear in the Gospel of John. If you think about how His love permeates all creation, if I can enter into that, and recognize that, then what need would there be for me to put others down in order to build myself up?

At the same mind, what use is there to cast judgment? As I recognize in the presence of God's love, that those things which matter to me once before, that I got so worked up about, begin to fall by the wayside. The more we can see this reality, the more that we can be creative rather than react to what others are doing. Now you get pulled into the debate. We can rest in divine love, being first gentle and generous with ourselves and our own brokenness, we show empathy for others rather than casting judgment. See, each of us is a sinner in desperate need of the mercy of God. We are powerless. We can't even atone for the smallest venial sin.

The Church has actually adopted the prayer of the tax collector and has a marvelous tradition of praying it. It is known as the Jesus prayer. It is a prayer that I have been praying since college. I have found great solace in praying this prayer. It goes like this:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

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In this prayer, we acknowledge our own wounding. Notice that this prayer, we're not acknowledging the sins of others. We're

acknowledging our own. And it's a humble turn toward the living God. The God who can save us from ourselves. It is difficult to pray this prayer and at the same time, judge our neighbor. Could I encourage us to pray the greatest prayer of the tax collector? *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.* This is a prayer of people who don't have it all together. This is a prayer for those of us who look into our own souls, and we find a mess. This is a prayer of someone who trusts only in the mercy of God.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

This is prayer of the lowly. It is a prayer when prayed with great humility pierces the clouds. And might I also suggest that it is a prayer that reaches out and touches the very heart of God.