

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 23, 2022

Lectionary Readings:

Sirach 35:12-14,16-18
2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18
Luke 18:9-14

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.
The Lord will rescue me from every evil.
The Lord hears the prayer of the humble.

Luke:

We need to remember that Jesus is still on his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, a symbol of the Church's journey through history. The disciples are on their way to Jerusalem where they will encounter the Living God in the most awesome event of human history: the dying and rising of Jesus Christ, his ascension into heaven, his glorification at the right hand of the Father, and the sending of the disciples throughout the world and throughout history. It is a time for teaching, a time of formation for the disciples, for the Church. This teaching is about the *attitudes* that we bring to prayer.

The Pharisee and the Publican in today's parable represent the range of attitudes that we find in the Church, among clergy as among laity — attitudes as we come to prayer. So, let us not be too quick to identify *others* when we hear this teaching. We need to point to *ourselves*.

The Pharisee was just an absolutely marvelous religious person. He obeyed all the laws he had been taught. There were 613 of them in the Code of the Law of Moses. Not only did he observe them all, he also knew the relative importance of those laws. He selected some of the vital religious observances to tell God about his faithfulness. He was the kind of person the clergy yearn to have more of in their congregations. He knew the rules and he followed them! Notice that Jesus does not fault him for his rigorous faithfulness in observing the laws.

The Publican did not even have a right to be in the Temple. *He stood at the back*. Well, he should! He was a collaborator with the hated Roman enemy. He did business with those Gentiles every day. He contaminated himself by handling pagan coins on which there were carved "graven images," idols that made him unclean. He had no right to enter the Temple precincts. He stood perhaps outside the doors. He extorted money from his own people and charged them more than he should have. That was the nature of the business, after all! Jesus does not condemn him for all his sins. The Publican called out to God: "Have mercy on me, a sinner!" The Pharisee cried out so people would hear him: "Lord, what a great person I am! I know you know, but I want everyone to know!"

The one was *justified* and not the other. He *was made upright to God by God*. He was forgiven his sins and was accepted by God as an upright person, far beyond the "uprightness" that observance of the Law could confer.

Salvation is an unmerited gift from God. The occasion for that gift lies in the repentance of the sinner. But God still gives it without it being earned.

Sirach:

Jesus, ben Eleazar, ben Sira, wrote an introduction in Greek for his grandfather Sira's book of wisdom sayings. He translated his grandfather's Hebrew language book into Greek. The original in Hebrew has not survived; it was not included in the books of the Hebrew Scriptures, so the Protestant translators did not put it in their Bible when they translated it into German and into English. Catholics have always revered this book and consider it inspired by God and to be included in the Bible. It has been called "The Book of the Church" or *Ecclesiasticus* in Latin. Sirach says that we come to God with open hands, hands that have been emptied by almsgiving, abstaining from evil, fasting, and observing the law of God.

Timothy:

Paul speaks of his *departure* from this world after a lifetime of struggle for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not the end of life; it is a crossing over to another kind of life, one of glorious reward for all his labors. No earthly person came to his defense when he was accused before the Roman courts. But Jesus Christ stood by him so that he might have an opportunity once more to proclaim the Gospel for all those Gentiles to hear. He is the Apostle to the Gentiles. He was able to survive that round; he did not have to be thrown to the lions. Another fate awaits him later.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where would you rank the prayer of the community with which you worship on a scale of humility? Does it show that this parish is conscious of its need for forgiveness? Is it constantly "blowing its own horn" before the Lord? Is the parish able to admit its mistakes and its shortcomings as a body? Does it often express its "cry for mercy" in its public prayer? Should it do so? How could the parish do that?

2. Where would you rank your prayer, personally, on the "scale of humility"? Have you ever asked your spiritual director to help you decide on a more humble way of praying? Do you often admit your mistakes and your shortcomings before the Lord? Do you know the difference between admitting your shortcomings and selling yourself short all the time? Does it bring honor to God to sell yourself short?

3. Would you consider a more frequent celebration of the sacrament of penance as a way of growing in humility before the Lord? How often do you celebrate penance in a sacramental way? Could you do so more often? Would you consider asking a priest to help you celebrate penance more effectively according to the true spirit of the renewed rite of penance? Discuss the practice of sacramental penance with your faith-sharing group.

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Find a copy of the renewed rite of penance issued by the Vatican in 1973 and approved in English in 1975. (It is hardly something *new* in the Church! It's been around for more than 50 years!) Study the theological and spiritual introduction. Look at the various suggestions for its proper and beneficial celebration.

PRAYER

**May the grace of the Holy Spirit
fill your heart with light,
that you may confess your sins with loving trust
and come to know that the Lord is merciful.**

Rite of Penance: Welcoming the Penitent

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Prayer not only reveals who God is but reveals also who we are. The content of our prayer says quite a lot about what kind of people we are. We disclose who we are by the words and attitudes with which we pray. If we come weekly to the eucharistic celebration and bring only our virtues and our high achievements to offer to the Lord, without a willingness to uncover and to present for healing our weaknesses and our sins, then we leave unhealed and unforgiven. At prayer, we may want to inform God of how good we are, how privileged God is to be in our company, how fortunate God is that we do not have to be forgiven much this time! The result is that we have revealed more about ourselves than we have learned about God.

St. Augustine taught that “*Lex orandi, lex credendi.*” The law of prayer reveals what we believe; our prayer is shaped by what we believe. Look at the Church’s prayer and you will see what the Church believes. The Catholic Church in the United States once petitioned the Holy See to relocate the sign of peace from where it has been, just before holy Communion, to a place at the very beginning of the celebration. Some suggested that we need to be reconciled to one another before we even begin to offer our gift at the altar, in conformity with the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:23-24). They also asked for approval of the practice of holding hands aloft, or joined to one another, during the Lord’s Prayer.

Praying with outstretched hands comes from a pre-Christian practice of the Greeks who held their hands open to the heavens as a sign of asking. Empty hands need to be filled. Hands that are already full of pride, self-righteousness, anger, bigotry and sensuality cannot be filled by God. There is no room in them. By holding our hands open to the heavens, we show that we have nothing; we are ready to receive everything God has to offer.

The postures of the body reveal the attitudes of the heart. We hold our hands clenched in an attitude of defensiveness and anger. Our prayer must be free and open to God’s will. Open hands mean an open heart.