

October 23, 2022
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 18:9-14

Jesus then addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. "Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity--greedy, dishonest, adulterous--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.' 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.' I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Background:

The gospel for last week was largely a parable that told of a persistent widow and unjust judge. In the last line of that text Jesus asked, "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8b) That line leads into the text that is the gospel this Sunday.

The gospels themselves give a distorted impression of the Pharisees. At the time of Jesus, they were respected as people who took their relationship to God seriously, and they tried to live out their relationship with God in their daily life. It is very likely that Jesus admired their dedication. Later, after the destruction of the temple, they clashed with the Christian community. Because the gospels were compiled during this later time period, texts like this one reflect that hostile attitude rather than Jesus' own.

The tax collectors were generally shunned by the people of Jesus' day because they collected money for the oppressing government in Rome. They were not paid a wage, and therefore they were expected to collect more than was required. They were known to use weights on the scales that were fixed and not accurate, to their own benefit. If a tax collector desired to repent of his sin, he was required to return all tax money he had collected, plus twenty percent. The longer one had been a tax collector, the more impossible this requirement became. The tax collector in prayer is described as standing at a distance and beating his breast. Such a gesture would be appropriate for a woman. For a man to pray in this fashion would express the deepest sorrow.

In the parable, the Pharisee is a model in the way that he prays and in daily life. In his daily life he has not entertained greed, dishonesty or adultery. His personal practice exceeds what is required. The requirement to fast is on the Day of Atonement, but he fasts twice a week. The requirement is to pay taxes on what one earns, but he pays the tax on all that he owns. The tax collector prays for mercy and makes no effort to correct the Pharisees' description of him, so it seems that he has been accurately described. The difference between the two is also expressed in their manner at prayer. The tax collector stands at a distance, does not dare look toward heaven, and beats his breast. His awareness of his relationship with God and how he has lived his life leads him to acknowledge his sin and ask for mercy. The Pharisee's life is the opposite of the tax collector's, and so also is his prayer. He drew close, looked toward heaven, and raised his arms toward God when he prayed. His prayer is that he is grateful that he is not like others.

In the final verse Jesus uses opposites to make his point clear. The opposites are in how the two men look upon themselves and in how God looks upon each of them. God looks with compassion on the tax collector who asks for mercy. The Pharisee, who in his prayer took credit for his virtue, does not ask anything from God, and he does not receive anything from God.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you know people who take their commitment to be a disciple seriously? How is this commitment expressed in how they live their lives?

2. Do you know people who are active members of AA or other recovery programs? How do you experience their commitment to their recovery? What is your experience of their assessment of themselves?
3. Have you encountered people who seemed be impressed with their holiness? Have you also encountered people who were unassuming in their personal relationship with God?
4. Have there been periods in your own life when you were operating from the assumption that you needed to earn God's love? How did that affect your relationship to God, to others, and to yourself?
5. Are you more apt to talk about the good qualities of another, or about their faults?
6. How and when do you experience sorrow for your sinfulness?
7. Do you ever experience resistance to expression of sorrow?
8. Can you take some time to talk honestly to God about your relationship to God, how you look upon others, and how that impacts your relationship to God?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for October 23, 2022, the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord is a God of justice, who knows no favorites. He hears the cry of the oppressed.
 The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow's complaint.
 The one who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens.
 The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal,
 nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, and the Lord will not delay.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth.

Let my soul glory in the Lord; the lowly will hear me and be glad.

The Lord confronts the evildoers.

When the just cry out, the Lord hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.

The Lord redeems the lives of his servants; no one incurs guilt who takes refuge in him.

Beloved: I am being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand.
 I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.

From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me,
which the Lord will award to not only me,
but to all who have longed for his appearance.
At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, everyone deserted me.
But the Lord stood by and gave me strength,
so that through me the proclamation might be completed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.
The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat
and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom.
To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus addressed a parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness.
“A Pharisee and a tax collector went up to the temple area to pray.
The Pharisee spoke this prayer to himself,
‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity --
greedy, dishonest, adulterous -- or even like this tax collector.
I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.’
But the tax collector would not even raise his eyes to heaven
but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’
I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former;
for whoever exalts himself will be humbled,
and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

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

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for October 23rd, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel from Luke is the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector who both go to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prays, "I thank you that I am not like others, or like this tax collector. I fast and pay tithes." The tax collector prays from a distance, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus says, "The tax collector went home justified, not the Pharisee. He who humbles himself will be exalted; who exalts himself will be humbled."

The other readings also have references to the humble, poor, oppressed, and lowly all getting help from God, as long as they serve him willingly. In the first reading from Sirach, "The Lord knows no favorites. He hears the cry of the orphan and the widow. The one who serves God is heard; the prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds." Psalm 34 proclaims, "When the just cry out, the Lord hears; he rescues them from all their distress. The Lord confronts the evildoers. He saves those crushed in spirit; he redeems his servants." In the second reading, from the second letter to Timothy, Paul writes, "The crown of righteousness awaits me and all who have longed for his appearance. At my first defense no one stood on my behalf, but the Lord stood by me and gave me strength."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!