

Everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

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C. S. Lewis writes in his classic book Mere Christianity, *The Christians are right: it is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But pride always means enmity... it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God. In God you call up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that... and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison... you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.*

The proud, as C. S. Lewis illustrates so clearly have no fellowship with others because like the Pharisee they are too busy looking down on everyone else. The soul eaten through with pride only seeks company with itself or with those from whom they can gain some form of pleasure or advantage. Even if the prideful soul is religious, it can have no fellowship with God, because such a soul's relationship with God is totally self-serving. This is important for us to recognize this morning, as Our Lord in the Gospel continues His commentary on the Temple and on pure worship. The Pharisees who prays, God I thank you that I am not like this Publican, but I do this and I do that... is not far removed from the Money Changers who look down on the poor travelers in the Temple and take advantage of them. The Pharisee in today's Gospel takes advantage of the Publican's position, judges him unfairly, and uses him to help boost himself up in God's eye. But we learn this morning that this attempt at maneuvering oneself to curry favor with God does not work!

How often we put ourselves in the same position with this Pharisee. We hear this morning's Gospel and we think, *At least I am not like that Pharisee... I can't be doing that bad if I am not acting like him!* What is even worse is when we hear this parable and decide that we will feign the humility of the Publican and then we become "holier than thou." But if we think these things, then we have lost the point of the parable. The Gospel plainly states, the parable is addressed to those *who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others*. Let us ask ourselves is this parable addressed to us? Do we trust in ourselves and our own abilities? Is there anyone we despise or cannot stand? If there is anyone we despise even a little bit let us pay close attention to the Words of our Lord. He tells us this parable because He wants us to grow in holiness, He wants us to love one another, and to pray for those who we find troubling. We are taught that the Pharisee should have prayed as the Publican did, and the Pharisee should have prayed for

the Publican. Instead of condemning the Publican the Pharisee should have blessed him. Likewise the Gospel should move us to be less like the Pharisee and more like the humble Publican. We shall know that the parable has made its way into our hearts if we pray, *Oh, Lord, help me to be more and more like that humble publican...give me the gift of humility...help me to have a better relationship with you and with others...show me where I need to stamp out my pride.*

And how easy it is for us to fall into pride. For even the faithful, pride can be an unexpected snare. It is easy to say with the Pharisee, *I give tithes once a month, I give to the Bishop's Lenten Appeal, I go to Mass every Sunday, I thank God that we use the right prayer book, that we sing the right hymns, that we are not as those Baptists, Methodists, or Episcopalians.* If we say these things then we are no better than the Pharisee. We must be like the humble Publican instead. We must allow the prayer book, the hymns, the scriptures, and the discipline of tithing and of giving alms to the poor to help us be true followers of Jesus. The *faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*, and which has been handed down to us, was never meant to be a source of pride, but to help us to recognize our own sinfulness and help prepare us for everlasting life. But unchecked pride can make all of this worthless.

As long as we are looking down we cannot look up to see what is above us. Today the Pharisee is so busy looking down on the Publican that he is totally incapable of looking up to God. And the Gospel tells us plainly, that of the two men, the man who recognized his own sinfulness before God left the temple justified. God heard his humble prayer and He lifted him up. Yet the prayer of the Pharisee, who looked down on everyone else, God would not hear. Jesus gives the promise, everyone that exalts himself shall be brought down, but everyone that humbles himself will be exalted by God. Amen.