

30th Ordinary Sunday
October 27, 2019
“Truly Righteous Behavior”

Sir 35:12...18
2 Tim 4:6...18
Lk 18:9-14

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

One of the important characteristics that parents and teachers must cultivate in their charges is a healthy sense of self-esteem. If young people are bullied by adults or peers – if they are often put down – or their work denigrated – they can lose self-esteem and sometimes even give up on life itself!

On the other hand, especially in the adult world, sometimes, someone needs to be taken down a notch. They need to realize that they are less than they think they are. They have an inflated opinion of themselves – And they need to face the truth about their shortcomings.

None of us is perfect. Some of us underestimate ourselves, our abilities, our gifts – and we need to be encouraged. Others overestimate themselves – and they need to be told that they really are not all that they think they are!

What children and young people need, in the first example, is a protector to encourage them, support them, and celebrate their steps toward growth and self-esteem. What the overly confident and self-assured need is a kind mentor who can face them with the shortcomings in their attitude and behavior. Fortunately, Jesus deals with this, directly, on the spiritual plane in the Gospel selection for today!

The Pharisee was not a bad man. Many would judge him to be a good and even exemplary man. He kept all the laws and prescriptions of the Torah – He gave 10% of his income back to the Temple – He ate very sparingly twice a week. But he was self-righteous! He looked down upon others. In fact, in his elevated opinion of himself, he placed himself above most of humanity – And he actually despised and disdained the unfortunate tax collector!

However, the tax collector knew his faults and sins – He experienced the pain of being rejected and ostracized by everyone – So, he simply begged God for mercy and forgiveness. And Jesus tells us that he was justified with the forgiveness of God.

Unfortunately, the self-righteous Pharisee received nothing from God – because he had justified himself!

For St. Luke, alms-giving, generosity toward the marginalized, good deeds, the recognition of personal sinfulness, the absolute need for God’s mercy and forgiveness – and, above all, humility – are what justify anyone. Certainly, it is not the pride of self-righteousness and the inflated ego of the self-assured!

In the Old Testament passage we are told that God always hears our prayers. God is marvelously just and fair. He is not unduly partial toward anyone. However, He certainly hears the cries of those who are oppressed in any way – especially those whom no one else hears or will have! These would be those who had no advocate in Hebrew society – the very poor, the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner, all of whom were often homeless and helpless. It was all too easy to overlook these people, avoid them, and hope that someone else would help them. However, God would not forget them – for God never forgets those who serve and honor Him in their hearts!

In the New Testament reading, St. Paul is facing an almost certain death penalty at his second trial. He is confident, but not overly confident, about his salvation. He did the best he could in everything that the Lord had sent him to accomplish. He always kept Jesus before him in his personal relationship with God. Moreover, he tells us that Jesus stood with him and gave him strength in even the worst of times! And his trust in God is such that he knows that God will rescue him from any threat of the evil one!

Brothers and Sisters, hopefully, there is more of the humble tax collector in us than that of the self-righteous Pharisee – Hopefully, we are always grateful for all of God’s blessings and gifts – Hopefully, we don’t look down upon others who have less or seem to be less – Hopefully, we recognize and repent of our past failures and sins – Hopefully, we see ourselves in daily need of God’s mercy, forgiveness, and love!

So, let us pray, today, in the words of St. Paul:

**“May we compete well;
may we finish the race;
may we keep the faith,
and, someday,
may the crown of righteousness be ours in God’s kingdom!”**

Amen.

October 27, 2019

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