

St Pius & St Anthony 30th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C(2025) Luke

I love how our gospel parable opens, “Two men go to Temple to pray.....” it sounds like that classic opening line to jokes leading to a hundred variations going something like, “*Two men walk in to a bar.....*”

Here’s one for example: “*A minster, a rabbi and priest walk into a bar, and the bartender looks up and says, “Hey wait guys, is this a joke?”*”

So, Jesus starts out a parable telling us today about “Two guys walking into the Temple.....”, and like a punch line, there is a surprise here too! Who leaves the Temple ‘justified’ and made right, but the unlikely “tax collector”, not the expected ‘religious authority’, the Pharisee!

Luke gave us a hint as to who was going to be held up as the truly ‘saved’ person leaving the Temple that day when he reported the occasion of which Jesus told this parable (we don’t always hear such good details). In Luke 18:9, Luke says Jesus told this parable to “*those who 1-convicted of their own righteousness and who 2-look down upon others with contempt*” (Lk 18:9). This parable reinforces Jesus’ message back in the Sermon on the Mount-Plain in Luke 6:37 & 42, where Jesus said, “*Do not judge, and you will not be judged;..... forgive, and you will be forgiven*” and then advised us to “*first, take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.*” Don’t arrogantly presume salvation – ours or others!

I want to slow us down though, because there is a quick tendency here to wish to scapegoat all religious hypocrisy onto the Pharisees (gang up on them). **See, there they go again!** In fact, there were some good Pharisees – Acts 5:34 tell us about Gamaliel a wise teacher, who cautioned the Sanhedrin about overreacting to Christians. Or Nicodemus (John 3:1) who was very open to Jesus, and helps with Jesus’ burial (19:39), or the Pharisees who warned Jesus about Herod coming after him (Lk 13:31). We don’t want to over-generalize this parable, grouping all Pharisees into a ‘condemned’ basket, nor are all tax collectors automatically ‘justified’ by Jesus. Such prejudicial ganging up, is exactly what the Pharisee in this parable does wrong. If we put them all down as a group, well, then, **there we go again!** We’d be as guilty of arrogant self-righteousness as them!

I think that is why we have the very words of the prayers of both the Pharisee and the tax collector in this parable (and their posturing gestures). Jesus wishes to instill the proper disposition of prayer in all of us: that we all stand before the judgement seat of God—it is not WE who sit in judgement over others (that’s the trap of Pharisaism-projecting superiority over others)!

So, what does each of these men say as their prayer words? Well, the 'justified' one is the tax collector. His prayer is *Simple, Brief & Honest*. He says the basic sinner's prayer (*same prayer we all say every mass at the beginning 'Lord Have Mercy, or I confess to Almighty God....'*) **"God, be merciful to me a sinner"** Lk 18:13 --To the point and from the heart! He knows he needs God, He knows his sin and readily admits it ashamedly. I hear him basically, asking God, "Is there hope for me God, can I be redeemed?" and God says "Yes." God hears the inner conviction, the heartfelt cry, his sincere desire to reform and be forgiven (*we do not hear any name in this parable, but interestingly we are going to hear in just a few verses- this is chapter 18:9-14, and in 19:1-10 whose conversion story do we hear but, Zachaeus – who repents through such generous acts of restitution-four times over!*)

. But not just in words, notice the tax collector's humility expressed in his gestures too- He prays from an 'out of way' spot, not center stage like the Pharisee. He doesn't presume even to look up to God- head stays down-he isn't concerned to look around to see who's watching. He beats his breast – as a sign of really 'feeling' what he is expressing, that the words he confesses, are felt from his heart-they are genuine. He is honest and humbled, and simply mutters, "God help me."

Yet, what words do we find in the Pharisee's prayer? Let's track it line by line. To not rashly condemn the Pharisee ourselves without hearing him out, I like to say he does start out okay, he just pridefully, gets off track by his prayer's second line. He prays, **"O God"** (Good start-addressing 'God'-we need to), then he goes on, **"I thank you"** (still good, don't we need to thank God for so much?), then he says, "that I am ***not like the rest of humanity***" (oh no, he's going off the rails here with the phrase 'rest of humanity'- as if He alone is God's gift to the whole world) and then he goes on to diagnose every sin of those others- that they all are **"—greedy, dishonest, adulterous"** — (he happens to have a handy list – how does he know those specifically-maybe 'it takes one to know one'?) but then the Pharisee completely crosses the line when he singles out a man - finger pointing and saying, **"or even like this tax collector"**. That's Too far! But then Pharisee closes by again praising himself **"I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income"** (18:11-12) That boastful line, basically sums up his whole prayer--Luke 18:11 had told us that the Pharisee 'spoke this prayer **to himself**.' I'd say, "Yes, the whole prayer is only addressed to HIM. He is celebrating himself, showboating himself, actually 'worshipping himself'. He is only talking to himself.

And this is where we come in again. We should hear this parable as a warning ourselves not to fall into the Pharisees trap of only talking to and about ourselves in our prayer. Some people suggest that the antidote to avoiding the self-righteous prayer of this Pharisee is to recall Jesus' teaching in the Lord's Prayer. The Pharisee's prayer praised himself, promoted his own will, his own kingdom, looking down on-condemning others and patting himself on his own back, while the Lord's prayer offers just the opposite disposition. The Lord's prayer begins, directing everything to the Father, heaven's direction, all holiness comes from God alone, and that His will, His kingdom rule and come-be done. It expresses humble reliance on God for needs-daily bread. It humbly admits sinfulness, 'forgive me' while also offering forgiveness (not condemnation) toward others, before ending with request for God to keep us away from being led astray in evil (meddling into others' sins).

Now, that is praying, but perhaps the one word of the Our Father most missed by the Pharisee in the parable is the first! The '**Our**' part! Remember his arrogant boast ('I am not like all rest of humanity-I alone'). But the Lord's Prayer wisely reminds us that we are not alone – the Lord's prayer is plural, "Give **us** today, **our** daily bread, forgive **us** as **we** forgive others, lead **us** not to trial..." The Pharisee missed that part and it's his condemnation. We're in this Temple of God, prayer together (God & Neighbor).