

Homily – Cycle C – 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

When I was in high school I was on the track team. The reason I was on the track team is because I was not a good enough player to be on the baseball team, and *that* is what I really wanted to do. Strangely, I remember the first race of my high school career...I started out really well, but as the race went on, I faded. You see, I had not developed a good plan...I had not prepared for a strong finish.

I think the Pharisee in today's Gospel has a similar problem. Pharisee's are not necessarily bad people; they follow the law ... they take their faith seriously. Look at how well the Pharisee begins his prayer by saying... "***O God, I thank you...***" That is a ***good start to any prayer!*** But the Pharisee fades even faster than I did in my first race, for he immediately follows this good start by telling God he is not greedy, dishonest or adulterous *like the rest of humanity*. He goes on to say how he fasts and pays the temple tithe! Being generous; honest; faithful...tithing and fasting ... these are all good things for him to do. ***These are all good things for us to do.*** Unfortunately, he has done them with the wrong attitude!

The Pharisee seems to be basking in the glow of his good behavior. He exalts because he believes he has been set apart from his fellow man, thanking God he is not like "...***these other people.***" His love of God became lost in his admiration of himself. He turned his prayer into a boast. Even worse, he assumes God's role as judge. He not only lists his own triumphs, but he reminds God of the tax collector's sins --- just in case God did not notice on His own.

He is not using his prayer to grow more deeply in love with God, which makes it impossible to grow more deeply in love with his fellow man.

Contrast that with the simple prayer of the tax collector; "***Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner.***" Make no mistake, this tax collector is ***not*** a nice man. He is a man who misappropriates funds, overtaxes his fellow citizens and keeps what is left over

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for his own benefit. ***But in his prayer, he humbles himself before God.*** He does not sing his own praises...he ***hungers for divine mercy!*** He ***longs*** for forgiveness and he ***yearns*** to be united with God.

When in our prayer life, do **we long for forgiveness?** When do **we yearn to be united with God?**

Are we properly prepared at the beginning of Mass when Father asks us to acknowledge our sins **and prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries?**

Are we truly contrite when we confess to God **and each other** that we have greatly sinned with ***our thoughts and words...in what we have done...***and in ***what we have failed to do?***

Are we sincere when we acknowledge there is no one to blame for our sins but ourselves when we pray, “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault?”

Do we visualize the veil of Heaven opening, when we ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the angels and saints, ***“to pray for me to the Lord Our God?”***

Do we ***really*** spend even an extra moment in prayer or make a commitment to pray for our fellow parishioners when those sitting next to us say, “...therefore I ask you ***my brothers and sisters*** to pray for me to the Lord our God?”

Do we recognize what a gift it is and feel the burden of our venial sins lifted when Father prays, “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins **and bring us to everlasting life?**”

Does the ancient three (3) fold litany, “Kyrie eleison; Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison” bring to mind what must have been going through Peter’s mind after his

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three (3) fold denial of Our Lord? Does this same three (3) fold petition for God’s mercy...bring us to a state of humble repentance? Our sins, these personal denials of Christ – may be as hurtful to Our Lord as Peter’s denials of 2,000 years ago. When the cock crowed and Peter recognized his sin, *he wept bitterly*...how do we respond?

Does our attitude resemble the Pharisee, a man who does good things and follows the rules, but with an “I am better than these people” pride? Or, are we more like the repentant tax collector who *acknowledges* his failures, *humbles* himself before God and man and prays, “...*have mercy on me, a sinner.*”

The words of this Mass are not only beautiful, they are meaningful. As our celebration continues...reflect on the words we pray, especially when we again humble ourselves, using words similar to those of the Centurion, who, like the tax collector, humbled himself, and prayed, “*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.*”

Let’s resolve to regularly examine our conscience; reflect on our thoughts, words and deeds with a *mind of humility*; look at what we have done and what we have failed to do; approach our confessor frequently; *not* with the attitude of the overconfident Pharisee, but with the mind and the heart of the *humble, repentant* tax collector.

And...when we do, as we approach the finish line in this race we call “Life” --- you will not repeat my performance in that first race of having a good start but a failed finish; rather...you will be much closer to that race described by St. Paul in his second letter to Timothy, where he wrote, “*I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.*” (2 Timothy 4:7)