

Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee Homily on St. Luke 18: 10-14

February 17, 2008

Much to learn from this Parable. Focus on three aspects: Their Way of Life, Their Prayer, What Comes Next. Then apply to ourselves.

Way of Life

- Pharisee: lived as well as possible. A life dedicated to being the very best Jew he could be. Scriptures. Prayer, worship, sacrifices, dress, eating, fasting. A model Jew. No visible imperfections.
- Recall the situation of the Publican. Not a model Jew. A traitor. A thief. A life of sin. Great contrast here.

Prayer

- Pharisee: not really even a prayer. Prayer is meant to unite us with God and His people.
 - His prayer united himself with his own ego. Alienated himself from God.
 - Judged others. Alienated himself from his community.
 - Notice sin? Fine. But pray for them. Weep for them. Do not condemn them or use them to your own glory.
 - Notice sin? Fine. But recognize that, like Paul, you are the chief of sinners. There may be a mote in the eye of the Publican, but there was a log in his own! We are told not to judge others. The role of charity and love.
- Publican: had prepared himself by recounting his sinfulness. Came to the temple and saw the vast gulf between himself and the perfection/love that is God. New that the only hope was through God's mercy. So he begged for that mercy.

Justification and What Comes Next

- The publican received the Lord's mercy. But what next? This is a parable, and the Lord did not go on. But we know from other encounters what would inevitably follow:
 - A change of life. A life spent cultivating virtue rather vice. He would begin to act more like the Pharisee, but his actions would be devoted toward God, not himself.
 - The rules must be kept, but only ends to the mean. Not idols.
 - Cannot neglect the rules. They are designed to weed our hearts so Christ can grow in them.
- We do not know if this Pharisee repented. In history, some did. St. Paul is a great example of this. Others did not.
 - His problem? The rules had become more than a means to an end. They had become an end in themselves. Idols. Moreover, he thought that he could be justified, could become holy, without the mercy and grace of God.
- The rules are how we prepare and tend the soil of our heart. The pharisee weeded it well by cultivating virtues. But instead of planting God in his heart, he planted pride. And it grew well! Just as God would grow well in the heart of the publican if he continued to tend to it with virtue.

Meaning for Us: *Let us make haste to follow the Pharisee in his virtues and to emulate the Publican in his humility, and let us hate what is wrong in each of them: foolish pride and the defilement of transgression. (Hymn from Matins)*

- Humility and the cultivation of virtue. The hymns tell us that we have neither. It must be both.. and!
- Must open our hearts to Christ, and keep them pure and spotless. Constantly weeding and watering with our tears. Don't have tears? Offer your lack of repentance to the Lord.
- This is a start. A new beginning. And quite fitting as we prepare for Great Lent and the Feast of Feasts that is to come.

May God hear us as we cry with the Publican: "Have mercy on me, a sinner."