

### Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (8/9/20)

Today's parable in many ways links into the previous discussion, and it presents us with these two interesting figures. Both observant in the law, both trying to encounter God in the temple. One however, does so in a prideful manner the other in humility and openness. Why was one justified and the other not? What is the attitude and stance that Jesus is directing us to? Let us explore this.

The Pharisee focuses on his rightness, he is thus unaware of his own faults - so blinded he is by his self-confidence and pride. He focuses on his assurance that he is better than others, focuses on his great learning, focuses on his actions that he feels prove his righteousness. By contrast, the publican does not assume that he has already achieved some level of perfection, he does not focus on actions preformed for show, or in his superiority over others. His stance is one of humility - without big show he humbly admits that he is a sinner. I would expect that not only does a sense of humility prevail in this one, but that this humility caused him to look at others with greater charity as well. Once aware of one's own faults, once contrite for our own sin, once able to remove the focus off of other people and examine in the clear light of reason our own relationship with the Lord, two important things happen. These things lead to his justification.

The pharisee - as his brethren largely did - assume that being righteous is a matter of externals. The compliance with the letter of the law, the performance of actions that are to be seen. St. Paul helps us to see that it is not in the observance of the law that we are justified, but it is the motive and intention of the heart that is what opens one to God. The externals must be preformed, but the attitude of the pharisee makes them less meritorious. Our Lord Himself counsels an approach different than the pharisee. Jesus will speak of the heart as the location from which all good or evil of the individual proceeds, He will explain that it is the internal willingness for detachment, the love of enemies (an internal affair), and the motive of the heart that is the best part of what we do. He praises the widow putting in a tiny offering, noting that the sacrifice that she made was worth more than the external action. He chides the disciples who scoff at perfume being spilt on the floor over his feet as a waste - noting instead the great love in the heart of this woman. He calls for an action and participation that is at once compliant with the law of God and his revelation, but also internally rooted in love.

The publican is internally rooted. Notice that he is still in the temple praying - the heart alone without action is not enough - it is not, as some suggest, enough that we have a good heart and are “good people” alone and so don;t need to go to Mass. There are mandates of religion, there is praise that God as Eternal Father and Lord is due. We must comply with the moral demands of God, the liturgical duties of a priestly people, the obedience to God through the Church he has set up - but we must approach these not from rote observance, not from a sense of superiority over others for having done so - but rather from a position of humility, and acknowledging our own sinfulness. This attitude leads to the two routes to justification that I referenced earlier.

First, by humility and charity we enlarge our hearts; and our actions are not hollow but become occasions for grace. The heart open to God receives the Divine presence, the heart open to God in humility and love gains merit for actions. If I come to Holy Mass to serve God, and to be filled and more joined to his presence in the Eucharist, it is a different thing than if I come complaining, inattentive, and checking my watch for when it will be over. If I give to a needy person grudgingly and with contempt for them it creates a very different spiritual benefit than if when I give I open my heart to love this person and so invite into my heart the God who is love.

Second, the attitude of the publican in true humility and charity changes our sight. It causes us to look to ourselves and our faults over those of others. It makes malicious vices like gossip less frequent, and love of family member, stranger, or enemy easier. In short - we become more Christlike as one who does not seek to be exalted, who humbles oneself for others, who sacrifices for others, and who despite all of their weaknesses and faults, loves others. This is the route to justification, and is why the publican goes home from the temple justified. Not self-justified by his own pride and self-praise, but exalted by God Himself who exalted the Publican as Jesus was exalted by the Father due to his humility, obedience, and great love.