

This gospel certainly is an indictment of contemporary culture in some ways. We are a generation who are used to getting what we want; in fact we demand it, sometimes.

We come to Mass every week – we consider ourselves to be good people, and we are. After all, we are here every week publically showing our faith and commitment to God, at least on Sundays. Jesus, through this parable, is asking us to look in the mirror and see what he sees, *a work still very much in progress.*

He suggests that there is no hope for people who think they have already arrived. Jesus came into the world to introduce us to a new reality. There was no need for him to waste his precious time with those who think they already know it all. Jesus likes sinners, first of all, because they know they still have room to grow.

When I first pondered the call to become a deacon some 24 years ago; I too felt that I arrived. After all I was active in the church, the community, the holy name and other catholic organizations and the bishop said – yes on my application; I was worthy.

However, as I journeyed through the five –year diaconate formation program and began to understand the enormity of my commitment and responsibility to God and his people, the less prepared and

confident I became. As I was ordained a deacon – I felt less than ready, less than holy and not worthy to stand at His table and raise the cup at all. But - God said to me in his own way that is exactly where you should be. If you were perfect – I would not have called you in the first place.

I know now, I will never be worthy on this side of heaven. As the host is raised and the celebrant says, “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” we respond, “Lord I am not worthy to receive you – but only say the word and we shall be healed.”
We have to live those words and drink in that phrase. We will never be worthy. If you think you are – I wish you God-Speed.

Mother Teresa recently raised to Saint Teresa of Calcutta this year is considered one of the greatest humanitarians of the 20th century, but, as saintly as she was, she doubted her faith at times. She felt the emptiness of a God that who silent in the midst of human suffering. Her struggle – should bring us great comfort. It moves us all closer to the table because we have been there. However, there are those who give no thought to their worthiness – because it just does not matter to them; they are worthy

in their own mind and that is all that counts. Mike Gill is such a person.

For 25 years, he was known as Michael Gates Gill, but that was when he was an advertising executive, a self-described "master of the universe" who put his job first, his wife and four children second and God not even on the map. Then he was fired. He was 53, replaced by someone, he says, "younger and cheaper."

These days, at 67, he's simply Mike, the friendly barista at a Starbucks in suburban New York. He's happy, he says, making lattes and cleaning the bathroom.

Gill, Yale-educated, has written an improbable memoir: 'How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live Like Everyone Else.'

The book is mostly about the joy of doing a job he likes and how he feels more respected at Starbucks than he did as a creative director at J. Walter Thompson, the giant advertising firm. It also deals with the low points of his life, his divorce and brain tumor his fall from his own self grandeur. Gill is in another place now only by the grace of God. Gill, on many levels, is the personification of this gospel.

Our transformation may come differently – but I pray that it comes for all of us. God accepts us as we are. There's not a sin too black, not a deed too awful, not a thought too horrible for him to forgive.

What cuts us off from his forgiveness and the freedom such forgiveness brings is our thinking that we have to justify ourselves.

Trusting in our own righteousness does not bring God's verdict of not guilty. Trusting in God's righteousness does.

Gregory Peck, the actor was waiting for a table in a crowded LA restaurant. He and a friend had been waiting for some time. They weren't even that close to the front of the line. Peck's friend became impatient, and he said to Peck, "Why don't you tell the maitre d' who you are?" Gregory Peck responded with great wisdom. "No," he said, "if you have to tell them who you are, then you aren't."

That is what I would like to leave you with this morning: If we have to tell God who we are than we aren't, either. We need to recall the words of the tax collector whom Jesus lifts up: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." We will never be worthy to hold this cup – and by the grace of God that is okay.