

Homily for Sunday Mass
October 27, 2019
Year C – Luke 18:9-14
----Father Michael Grant George Cadotte----

So, there was this brash, well educated, young pastor who was assigned for some time to a little neighborhood parish. Finally, one day his talents were recognized by a much larger, richer, and prestigious parish and he leapt at the opportunity to fully use his great talents in such a place where they could be appreciated and better received. After resigning his pastorate to go lead another church, a pastor was approached by an endearing older member of the congregation. She wept over the pastor's decision to leave, "Things will never be the same..." she said.

The minister tried to console her by saying, "Don't worry, I'm confident you will get a new pastor who is better than me."

She continued to sob even heavier and choking back tears replied, "That's what the last three pastors have said, but they just keep getting worse." (Source: Unknown)

Jesus tells us that, "...whoever exalts himself [such as our pastor friend in that story] will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (LK 18:14).

I call the moment our pastor friend encountered with one of his more openly frank parishioners as a God-Slap-Moment and Lord knows I have had quite a few come my way in my years. I have learned, most of the time, to find humor in them and always pause after such a 'slap' and take a small moment to say, "Thank you God for that, I needed it. Sorry for being such a dork."

You see, for most of us, we have been blessed with so much. You may sit there and huff and think that your home, car, cloths, bank account, jewelry (or the lack of it), or any other material thing you want to raise up on the modern altar of success, just does not add up to what others have. Well, yes, you would be correct, but then again it never will. No matter what self-prescribed pigeonhole in life, society, or YOU, give yourself there will always be those better off and certainly worse off. And the more God blesses us with good, whatever, the more we owe a debt back to God. And the more success we achieve in life, which is to say that God gives to you, the more we have to be careful not to boast, not to think we did it with no help from others and from God, and not to compare our success, or good deeds, to others.

Prayers of the successful – a cautionary tale...

Occasionally you will find me watching a sporting event on TV and (especially with football) I see players point up when they make the big play or get the touchdown. This truly bothers me as I don't think that God gives one ¼ of one rat dropping of such things. This is a boastful prayer that is more a celebration of self and self-achievement (wrapped in bad piety) than it is in humble prayer to God. This is a classic modern example of the Pharisee but on an even grander scale than a Temple audience ever was back then.

We all do this in our own little ways and it is okay to give thanks to God for blessings given us but do try, my friends, to temper that with the important prayers of those around you that may not be basking in such success. And one final note on success...give it back! Remember, faith (such as a good healthy prayer life) is so important but if you have such faith without good deeds, that is doing good for others for other's sake and not your own, then your faith is nothing!

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It is worse than nothing, it is, in the mind of Jesus, "...lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, [and Jesus] will spit you out of [his] mouth..." (Rev 3:16)! How could that be worse than cold? Simple, if you are given more, than more is expected of you. We are given salvation through Jesus Christ and more is expected of us than those that don't believe. We have been given eternal salvation and if we are not HOT on that than I fear we are lukewarm and of no good. Remember, "...everyone to whom much has been given, much... [is]... required..." (LK 12:48)

Each Mass we take a few moments to reflect on ourselves, the day, the week, or what ever weighs on our minds. I do hope that you spend more time in this type of reflection at home, in the car, at a moment of safe reflectiveness at work, wherever, to continue to check ourselves for the danger of being lukewarm, of haughtiness, or boastfulness, and pride. "Pride, [after all] is a chain binding us to the hamster wheel that goes nowhere, that cannot satisfy our hearts..." [1] and certainly will not satisfy God.

The flaw of false comparison

And as we reflect inwardly it is also critical, we reflect outwardly on what the world needs around us and pray earnestly for those situation but also pray for how you, each of you, can make some small effort to effect positive change upon them. Maybe that is just being in prayer, but in many situations, I am sure there is more that can be done and certainly some small part of that where you can play a role as Christ's hands and feet active in the word.

There is another danger here that our Pharisee became tripped up on in today's Gospel reading (Luke 18:9-14), false comparisons. It is all too easy for friends to wipe aside our small sins and failings under that excuse that we are so much better than another's more grievous sins. But if we don't walk in another's shoes, we don't know their heart fully and we may miss a part of them that is pure and good – maybe even more than we are. Remember, the Pharisee, to the first audience Jesus was talking to, he was *the* model of the perfect person socially and religiously yet he had it all wrong in the end.

"No one who despises and condemns their fellow human-beings can pray properly. For in prayer we don't lift ourselves above others but come before God as one of a great mob of sinning, suffering, struggling human beings." [2] As an example of how this should work look at the example of Archbishop Lanfranc (a famous Catholic bishop of Canterbury) who had a deep understanding of his own shortcomings and would get down on his knees with every penitent, and pray for forgiveness of his own sins, before presuming to hear those of their own.

So, pray and do. Pray thanksgiving for your blessings but always in check with where you need to improve. Pray for those in need and of less success and pray for guidance on what you can do to help them, to help God. And for God's sake, PRAY! AMEN

---Citations---

The New American Bible: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2010 ISBN 9780529064844

[1] Carol & Dennis Keller. Volume2 Digest, Vol 67, Issue 4