

God Alone is Holy

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

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In the 1960s, at the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church was reformulating many of its approaches to theology and Church practice. One of the topics revolved around holiness. Prior to the council, holiness was seen as an accomplishment of those who gave their lives entirely to God by turning away from the world and taking on the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Holiness was about personal effort and sacrifice. Because of this, some people were deemed holier than others, the saints of course being the holiest of all.

At Vatican II, however, the archbishop of Munich, Cardinal Julius Döpfner, made a comment that reset the trajectory of the discussion on the church. He boldly said, 'God alone is holy.' This may seem obvious to us, but if we really think about it, it does challenge a whole mindset that many of us have. Yes, certain people can *become* holy, but God alone *is* holy. God is the source and fullness of holiness. Because of this basic truth, there is really no room for comparisons as to who is holier than who. All holiness belongs to God.

In this weekend's Gospel, we have an individual who would have made a great pre-Vatican II Catholic. He had all the marks of holiness: went to the temple to pray, not stuck in a sinful lifestyle, fasted twice a week, paid tithes on his whole income, etc. We should give credit where credit is due. I'm sure this man made many personal sacrifices in order to be the best person he could be. He was a good person. The problem, though, was that he took credit for it. He thought his holiness originated in himself. As a result, he fell into the trap of comparing himself to others: "O

God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity...” He thought he was holy.

The other individual in our Gospel today wasn't very devout. He stood off at a distance in the temple and prayed, 'O God be merciful to me a sinner.' Honestly, this tax collector wasn't holy. The key difference between him and the Pharisee was that the tax collector knew it. He knew 'God alone is holy' and that he was not God. He knew that any holiness he had was from God and that he needed mercy. At the end of the parable, Jesus says, "I tell you the tax collector went home justified, not the Pharisee."

The Gospel teaches us that it is better to recognize the holiness of God than our own holiness. To think too much about our own holiness is to set ourselves up for failure. We certainly can have moments in our lives when we are good, but without grace, we reach our limits. We will come up against our own repeated sinfulness. Any and all holiness we have at any point in our life is God's holiness flowing through us. It all belongs to God; we are merely the instruments of it.

We shouldn't compare our holiness to others because God alone is holy.

Do I recognize my holiness as not originating with me, but coming from God?

Like in all things in life, it is easy to take credit for something that really isn't ours. It makes us look good and feel good. But let us never take credit for holiness. All holiness comes from God and all holiness will return to God, for God alone is holy.