

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost EF 2014- Luke 18: 9-14

Jesus has given us a parable of tremendous contrasts. With a surprise finish to his hearers he proclaims a new proverb that has entered into our daily lexicon:

*[...every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled,  
and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.]*

It would be a correct, yet simple judgment to proclaim the Pharisee as arrogant and the Publican as humble.

So... let's just avoid arrogance and embrace humility. Just do it.

Of course, there is the lie and the trap that the Pharisee fell into, because he also had committed himself to the "just do it" form of religion.

Truly, of the two of them, the Pharisee was the kind of person that every parish would want.

What would you think:

- of someone who was not only here every Sunday, but was here every time that you came to daily Mass?
- of someone who not only contributed their weekly offering, but also sacrificed for other big parish needs, like for a new air conditioner?
- of someone who is always helping at our parish functions and hangs around to clean up afterwards?

Isn't that the person I aspire to be like?

Make no bones about it, my answer is "yes".

I have been practicing to be like that person, to the best of my abilities and discipline.

The tax collector, on the other hand, behaves in a way that we wouldn't tolerate in a fellow parishioner.

The Publican of old was often a local person exacting taxes for the Roman occupiers. He would charge extortionist fees by threatening impoundment, imprisonment, torture or death.

Now, how would you like to pray the Rosary next to someone like that?

The Publican in our parable wasn't calling himself a sinner out of false modesty.  
He truly is a sinner.  
He's done awful things.

Again, I bring the comparison back to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and make it a little more personal.

I was raised by two loving parents who lived by integrity and the American work ethic.  
They raised their children to be the same.  
We went to church.  
We worked hard.  
We studied hard and we competed hard.

I got a degree, a job, a marriage and I've never been arrested.

In the neighborhood where I work there are high-school drop-outs, the unemployed, fatherless families, criminal records and a malaise of hopelessness of ever having a chance at the American dream.

I have often heard the phrase that these folks are experiencing the consequences of their decisions.  
And that may very well be true.  
One could also include that I was given all of the advantages of our culture, but I'm not going to argue that point much further here, because in the end, it isn't the real point.

The point is that I hope that I have grown from decade to decade and that my efforts realize some results.

And low and behold, I find evidence of success.  
Without me bragging about it, (because I want to be seen as humble, too),  
I used my intelligence, competence and diligence to the best of my ability.  
I can thank that for my success.  
Although, that sounds a lot like me thanking me for my success.

Can you see how much I am practicing to be like a Pharisee?

What saves me?  
It is actually those folks in the neighborhood who deal with poverty, broken homes, unemployment and dysfunctional distraught lives.

I have seen time and time again a generosity of spirit and a dependence upon each other and God that is truly humbling and saves me from my ego.

I **can** be thankful for my blessings, as long as I remember that all good comes from God.

These blessings are to be embraced, enjoyed and shared.

Yes, I go to the neighborhoods to share the blessings bestowed on me.

But, also yes, I go to the neighborhoods because there I am saved.

I am saved from myself.

I am saved by Jesus, by becoming completely dependent on his grace, often seeing that grace in those he's sent for my salvation.

The relevant difference between the Pharisee and the Publican or me and the neighborhood gang member, is not so much between the good that is done and the evil that is perpetrated, but by the attitude of our hearts.

**What** we pray is important. Our Lord taught us what to pray.

Of greater importance is **how** we are to pray: with our hearts open, grateful and dependent on God's mercy.

It is there in our absolute dependency that we are closest to our divine Father.

Jesus tells us that in the Beatitudes (Mt 5).

Blessed are:

- the poor in spirit
- they who mourn
- the meek
- the hungry
- the merciful
- the clean of heart
- the peacemakers &
- the persecuted

Pope Francis in a recent audience this month with around 6000 of the faithful told them that,

*"Christians should memorize not only the Ten Commandments but also the beatitudes, which Jesus taught as the path to true happiness."*<sup>i</sup>

I am called to respond to God's love and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.  
I will try to fast and tithe and share as the Pharisee.  
I will even contribute to the air conditioning fund.  
But whatever good I hope to do is only made holy when acknowledging  
that all good is only possible through God's mercy and not of my own  
making.

In the lobby, I left copies of the Beatitudes and Ten Commandments for  
anyone who wants to take up the Pope's challenge to memorize them,  
to keep them close to one's heart,  
and allow them to guide our path to true happiness.

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<sup>i</sup> [http://ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-says-memorize-beatitudes-assess-your-care-needy#disqus\\_thread](http://ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-says-memorize-beatitudes-assess-your-care-needy#disqus_thread)