

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time- Cycle C 2007

Homilies are aids to encountering the living Word.
Please read the scripture passages that this homily hopes to explore.

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

The readings can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/102807.shtml>

“Let you beware of lifting yourself above anyone, even above those who are great sinners.

For he who is guilty of many great sins, often times will be delivered from them through humility.

So never let you hold yourself as more virtuous than another, for fear that declared just by your own sentence, you may be condemned by the sentence of God.”

I want to thank St. Basil for that last statement.
He’s got me pretty well figured out.

In my previous employment as a police officer, I had spent some time working vice.

Part of my job was to eradicate street prostitution in Kalamazoo.

Well, I’m proud to say that over a couple decades, the Public Safety Department has done a pretty good job in doing just that.

Over the course of my assignment, I had come to know dozens of prostitutes. I came to know about them, their families and their hopes.

I don’t want to romanticize their situation.

Despite Hollywood’s attempts, there is nothing glamorous about street prostitution.

It is dangerous, disease-ridden and desperate.

Being busted by the police is not a prostitute’s biggest worry.

It was very easy for me to hold them in contempt, for the manner of their lives and for their blight on our community.

After all, I was a police officer.

I stood for what was right.

I had a wonderful family and was a good church-goer.

I told you St. Basil had me figured out.

I think the Pharisee and I would get along great.

We New Testament people hear the word, Pharisee, and think bad guys.

The Pharisees of Jesus time was a sect of Jews who were trying to do the right thing in a Greco-Roman society that was concerned with wealth, power and pleasure.

The fact that Jesus casts Pharisees in the bad guys role has something to say to me and to you.

I'd guess that most of us here would step up when asked if you stood for doing the right thing in the face of society's corruption.
Of course, standing up for right is a good thing.
The hypocrisy comes when I attribute my doing the good thing to my goodness.

When I look at everything that is going right in my life, I am pretty willing to give myself a lot of credit.
Yes, I did make some good decisions.
There were times, I would say, that I even cooperated with God's will.
However, when I really spend time looking at my life, I find I am counting gifts that I could only receive and not obtain:
my loving parents; the affluent middle-class lifestyle and education; the fact that my wife, Jan, gave me a second chance for a first date.

Well, while I was mired in my own self-righteousness, the Lord allowed me to see some of these ladies who were prostitutes in a new light.
I can tell you they weren't self-righteous like I was.
Some could clearly see the depth of the chasm between what they were and what God hoped for them.
I have seen conversion of heart for some of these ladies.
Some had come to know God's mercy in a way that I was too proud to acknowledge.
Why would I need that kind of mercy from God?
That gift of insight made me a better vice-cop.
Sure, they knew I would arrest them anytime I caught them breaking the law.
But while they were standing on the corner and I was parked by the curb preventing their business, we actually had some good talks.
They had my human respect and I theirs.
At the end, I was better for it; they were better for it;
and God was certainly more a part of all of it.

Tax collectors were despised by all Jewish society in Jesus time. The humility of this tax collector is a lesson to who we are to be.
We are to proclaim to God: "I am a sinner, have mercy on me."

Humility is not just a humane trait we are to embrace.
It is a divine trait.
It was the transcendent God of the universe, the one who brought all into existence that, in humility, took on our form, experienced the pain of child birth, disease, suffering and death.
It was in his rising that we were given hope that in joining our humility to his, we would experience the everlasting loving presence of God in this world onto the next.

When we come to that part of the Mass, the "Kyrie Eleison", the "Lord have mercy", can we practice opening our hearts to his mercy?

Can we carry that sense of mercy when we come together in communion?
Can we take that received mercy and share it with all of those to whom we
would otherwise turn up our noses?

Lord have mercy.