



Homily for 10/27/2019

30th Sun. Ordinary Time, C

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

Hold Fast to Doctrine! Hold Fast to Prayer!

In today's readings we hear humility exalted and pride cast down. The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds and the Lord hears the cry of the poor. The humble sinner is justified while the proud pharisee was not.

When talking about pride, however, we must note that we distinguish this deadly sin from other usages of the word pride. There are non-sinful prides, such as pride in one's country: "I'm proud to be an American!" One also can be proud of one's children, meaning that one takes delight in their accomplishments or in the manner in which they exercise their free will. These are not what we mean when we refer to the sin of pride.

For an example of the deadly sin of pride, note how this played out in this scene from the Gospel. The Pharisee, when he prays, prays to himself (*pros heauton* in the Greek). Normally one's prayers are directed towards Almighty God and there is a certain "fear of the Lord" involved. Here is one instead who is so impressed by his own accomplishments that he puts himself in the place of God. And this is the very definition of the deadly sin called pride. It is a disordered love of self in which a person sets himself up in the place of God.

Pride is actually idolatry. Idolatry is a violation of the First Commandment, "I am the Lord your God . . . You shall have no other gods before me."

From the Catechism we hear:

2112 The First Commandment condemns polytheism. It requires man neither to believe in, nor to venerate, other divinities than the one true God. Scripture constantly recalls this rejection of "idols, [of] silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see." These empty idols make their worshippers empty: "Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them." God, however, is the "living God" who gives life and intervenes in history.

2113 Idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship. It remains a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature [mother earth, fertility] in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example, satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc. Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and mammon." Many martyrs died for not adoring "the Beast" refusing even to simulate such worship. Idolatry rejects the unique Lordship of God; it is therefore incompatible with communion with God.

2114 Human life finds its unity in the adoration of the one God. The commandment to worship the Lord alone integrates man and saves him from an endless disintegration. Idolatry is a perversion of man's innate religious sense. An idolater is someone who "transfers his indestructible notion of God to anything other than God."

Now many have been rightly saddened and affected by the recent events happening in the Church. If you are aware of them and are looking for specific instruction and guidance I would point you to the excellent open letter of Bishop Athanasius Schneider, which I have posted on the parish's social media and which I recommend to you.

However, the chief idol that we must always confront is the idolatry of self. He prayed to himself; this is pride. This is the essence of idolatry. It is an idolatry even worse than those who worship mother earth or other pagan idols. As evil as worshiping a statue of mother earth, pride is even worse.



I believe that the true deception is taking place via the exaltation of man through the ideology of humanism in which man becomes the measure of all things. This is in direct contradiction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and is the subtle error that is leading many astray in the name of human progress. Even the Catechism mentions this when it says:

“675 Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the “mystery of iniquity” in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.”

I believe we are confronting that reality now. And many ask what the answer is. It is clear: Humility is its antidote. Humility has as its root, *humus* or dirt in Latin.

Humility is the virtue directly opposed to pride. St. Bernard defines it: “A virtue by which a man knowing himself as he truly is, abases himself.”

Humility expresses itself most immediately in prayer. Prayer of the sort modeled by the tax collector in today's Gospel. It is characterized by fear of the Lord, in which he stands afar off, bows his head, beats his breast in repentance and simply and honestly admits his guilt and asks for pardon: “Be merciful to me a sinner”.

In Cardinal Sarah's new book, “The Day is Now Far Spent”, he quotes St. Alphonsus Liguori, who says, “the one who prays is saved, the one who does not pray is damned.” He even says that “Someone who no longer prays has already betrayed. . . is already walking on the path of Judas.” This prayer must be humble prayer before the Lord. Cardinal Sarah gives us clear and solid advice during these times, “Hold fast to doctrine! Hold fast to prayer!”

If we are to root out idolatry in the world today, it must start within. Come, let us bend the knee in worship. Here in the Mass we offer the greatest and most humble prayer. In the prayer over the gifts for the Feast of Christ the King, the Church prays, “As we immolate to you, O Lord, the sacrifice by which the human race is reconciled to you, we humbly pray that your Son Himself may bestow on all nations the gifts of unity and peace.” May this be our prayer today and every day as we approach the Saving Sacrament of the Sole Redeemer of mankind.