

Homily for the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Luke 18:9-14

Jesus is loaded for bear in this parable addressed to “those who are convinced of their own righteousness and who despise everyone else.”

Now, those are Some. Nasty. Folks.
Not just a little holier-than-thou,
but convinced of their righteousness;
not just disdainful,
but despising everyone else.

Truth be told,
I doubt we have any folks here who fit this description to T,
but I’m pretty sure there are some ways that many of us
come closer to the Pharisee than to the tax collector
in the story Jesus tells.

Try these on for size and see if any fit...

“O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity:
- not like the Republicans who lie about the war;
- not like the Democrats who have no courage or patriotism;

“I thank you God that I’m not like the ones from “that” parish;
that I’m not from “that” side of town;
you know how different “we” are from “them”.

“And Lord, I thank you that I’m not like those who have no clue
about the right answer to the Willard School question.

“I thank you that I’m not like the bishops and chancery officials:
mercenary, ruthless and uncaring.

“I thank you I’m not like those in the advocacy groups
who can’t let go and get on with things.

“I thank you that I’m not like the liberals
who question everything the church does and teaches.
How can they call themselves Catholic, Lord?

"I thank you that I'm not like the conservatives
who harp on keeping the law
instead of caring for peoples' needs.
How can they call themselves Christian?"

Does this mean the Lord doesn't want us to have an opinion?
Of course not.
But he is warning against our tendency
to *demonize* those whose ideas and policies oppose our own.

When I am so convinced of my opinion, my view, my take on things
that I begin to believe that my right-ness, my correctness
entitles me to be mean and prejudiced,
- entitles me to despise others -
then I am exalting myself
and no prayer of mine in a place like this or anywhere else
will send me home justified before God.

God does not measure my life against the success or failure,
the wisdom or stupidity of my neighbor.

God measures my life and yours
against his word and his law - and how you and I abide by it.
And the greatest law against which God measures us is the law of love.

As Jesus said:
*Love your enemies,
do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you,
pray for those who mistreat you.
Forgive and you will be forgiven.
Do to others as you would have them do to you.
Stop judging and you will not be judged.
Stop condemning and you will not be condemned.*

All from the lips of Jesus...

True prayer begins, as does our prayer every weekend,
with our acknowledging our need for God's mercy.
"To prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries,
let us call to mind our sins and remember God's mercy..."

The Lord forgives the humble sinner who prays for God's pardon.

And the Lord will forgive the proud Pharisee
who comes to see that indeed he IS just like the rest of humanity:
sinful and in need of God's mercy.

Though we named ourselves as sinners as we begin our prayer today,
still, the Lord welcomes us to his table
where we receive his humbled self in the Eucharist.

May the sacrament we celebrate and receive here
teach us to love and respect all,
and especially those whom we are quick to condemn.

Rev. Austin H. Fleming