

Fr. Romeo Evangelista's Homily
October 27, 2019
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

"How am I to pray?" I heard this question many times in my life. Today in a parable, Jesus teaches us how by showing us how two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector, prayed.

While the Pharisee started his prayer with head unbowed, the tax collector would not even raise his eyes to heaven. Their posture reminds us of the story of a naughty lawyer who asked an old farmer, "Why don't you hold up your head in the world as I do? I bow my head to no one". The farmer answered, "Sir, see that field of grain? Only those heads that are empty stand upright. Those that are well-filled bow low". So first, we are to approach prayer in a spirit of humility. This the tax collector did, but the Pharisee did not.

The Pharisees were not bad people. They dedicated themselves to the law and were sincere in their religious observance. They were esteemed by the people for their zeal. Jesus in the parable did not condemn the Pharisee for his lifestyle and religious observance; he condemned him for his self-righteous attitude as reflected in his prayer. O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous or even like this tax collector. The Pharisee then went on to enumerate his good works. Worse, he extolled himself at the expense of the tax collector. In this regard, how right Mahatma Gandhi who said, "It has always been a mystery to me how men feel themselves honored by the humiliation of their fellow beings".

On the other hand the tax collector approached God beating his breasts; O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Acknowledging his sinfulness in the face of his dishonesty born out of greed, he threw himself totally before God's mercy.

In many ways, we behave like the Pharisee sometimes. When we do good works, we expect that they are to be credited to us. Sometimes in an outburst piety we pray for the

“conversion of sinners” which, of course, excludes ourselves. Sometimes we think that we are the only one who is worthy of receiving Jesus in Holy Communion.

Today Jesus is teaching us to follow the example of the tax collector in life as well as in our prayers. He wants us to acknowledge that everything we are and have, came from God. And we are saved not because of our own merit but because of God’s mercy. This is what the tax collector was able to capture in his prayer and the Pharisee did not.

How are we to pray? First, we approach God with all humility. As we are reminded in our first reading today, “The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal. Then we attribute to Him whatever good we have done, thanking him for giving us the grace to do so.”

With the tax collector as our model, we can begin by making his prayer our own, O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Then we will not only receive God’s mercy; we will also end up justified before him.