

SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

Philippines – North Province

LECTIO DIVINA

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

23 October 2016

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Holy Spirit of light and love, you are the substantial love of the Father and the Son; hear my prayer. Grant me a strong and living faith which makes me accept all revealed truths and shape my conduct in accord with them. Give me a most confident hope in all divine promises which prompts me to abandon myself unreservedly to you and your guidance. Infuse into me a love of perfect goodwill, and act according to God's least desires. Make me love not only my friends but my enemies as well, in imitation of Jesus Christ who through you offered himself on the Cross for all people. Holy Spirit, animate, inspire, and guide me, and help me to be always a true follower of you. Amen.



1. LECTIO. What does the Biblical text say?

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. ¹⁰

“Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.

¹¹ The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.’ ¹³ But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ ¹⁴ I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (NAB)

⁹ Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’

¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” (NRSV)

⁹ Sinabi rin niya ang talinghagang ito sa mga taong matuwid ang tingin sa sarili at hinahamak naman ang iba. ¹⁰ “May dalawang lalaking pumasok sa Templo upang manalangin, ang isa ay Pariseo at ang isa ay maniningil ng buwis.

¹¹ Tumayo ang Pariseo at nanalangin nang ganito: ‘O Diyos, nagpapasalamat ako sa iyo sapagkat hindi ako katulad ng iba na mga magnanakaw, mandaraya, mangangalunya, o kaya’y katulad ng maniningil ng buwis na ito.

¹² Dalawang beses akong nag-aayuno sa isang linggo at nagbibigay rin ako ng ikasampung bahagi mula sa lahat ng aking kinikita.’

¹³ Samantala, ang maniningil ng buwis nama’y nakatayo sa malayo at di man lamang makatingin sa langit. Dinadagukan niya ang kanyang dibdib at sinasabi, ‘O Diyos, mahabag po kayo sa akin na isang makasalanan!’ ¹⁴ Sinasabi ko sa inyo, ang lalaking ito’y umuwing matuwid sa harapan ng Diyos, at hindi ang Pariseo. Sapagkat ang sinumang nagmamataas ay ibababa at ang nagpapakababa ay itataas.”

(Magandang Balita Biblia)

2. MEDITATIO. What does the Lord say in His Word?

Some insights on the Word.

THE PRAYER OF THE HUMBLE

The lessons of Jesus on prayer continue with this text. Immediately before this, he told his disciples about the need to pray always, without becoming weary. Now he addresses a more specific (albeit indefinite) audience: “those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else.” This particular note in the text is interesting because people of this sort continued to be part of the crowd that followed Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. Although it is not identified that to this group belonged the Pharisees, we know that they have been with him in this journey (cf. Luke 16:14–15). However, the parable was not exclusively for them even though one character in the parable is a Pharisee. Even apart from these Pharisees, there may be among the disciples some who were convinced of their righteousness. The whole phrase “those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else” is virtually a description of the content of the prayer of the Pharisee in the parable.

Jesus then tells the parable—about two men, common figures in first century Palestine. Both men went up to the Temple to pray: they were both believers. One was a Pharisee and the other, a tax collector. By specifying the personages as such, Jesus intends to present a contrast.

Pharisees are known sticklers for the observance of the Law and religious practices, and what pertains to righteousness. They are faithful observers the Torah. The Jewish historian Josephus describes them as “a body of Jews known for surpassing the others in the observances of piety and exact interpretation of Laws.” In his gospel, Luke does not paint a good picture of the Pharisees. He speaks of them as constantly present in the ministry of Jesus—carefully observing his words and actions, sometimes becoming his interlocutors, at other times at the receiving end of his criticisms, as when Jesus said “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1).

The tax collectors, on the other hand, were those responsible for collecting taxes for the Romans, the system of which has been open to abuse and dishonesty. Thus, tax collectors have been identified with the evils of the system. This group has been associated with sinners. However, Luke presents a promising picture of tax collectors. At the beginning of the gospel, some of them have gone to John for baptism, asking him what they should do, to which the Baptist replied, “Stop collecting more than what is prescribed” (Luke 3:13). Among Jesus’ followers was a tax collector, Levi. Jesus also sat at table with such men and thus he was also known as “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 7:34).

Jesus provides further contrast in the parable by entering the thoughts of the two characters and revealing the content of their prayer. We are told that the Pharisee “took up his position” and although this is not specified, it is perhaps clarified by looking at it against the manner by which the tax collector prayed (v. 18). The Pharisee probably stood erect, with his face raised, and he also positioned himself in front of the others who also prayed. The prayer of the Pharisee was not so much “a prayer for himself,” but more of “a prayer about himself”: “O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous... I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.” True, it was a prayer of thanksgiving, but one that glorifies, not God, but the Pharisee himself. Literature calls it egotism, and psychology, narcissism. It is a prayer of one “who is convinced of his own righteousness and despised everyone else.”

The tax collector's disposition was the exact opposite: standing off at a distance, with downcast eyes, ashamed to raise his eyes to heaven, beating his breast—all of these, signs of contrition. It is the disposition of one who is ashamed, or one who is truly sorry for what he has done. His words are simple: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." Like the Pharisee, he also sees and acknowledges who he is, but the tax collector sees his sinfulness and therefore becomes full of shame and sorrow. His solution is to go up the Temple and pray. In his prayer, the man calls on God to ask for a favor: *mercy*. This is what we do at the beginning of each Eucharistic celebration—we beg the Lord for mercy. There is even an alternative formula for the act of contrition that is almost like the prayer of the tax collector: "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"

The parable ends with the prayer of the tax collector. Within the story itself, there was no resolution to the prayers of either Pharisee or tax collector. Jesus, however, concludes, saying that the tax collector went home justified, or that he went home upright in the sight of God. It means that God has declared this man upright. The one who is righteous is after all the one who may have sinned but has received God's declaration as righteous. The self-righteous one, however, is not declared by God as righteous.

Jesus then goes beyond the situation of the persons in the parable. He takes the self-exaltation of the Pharisee and the self-deprecation (or better, humility) of the tax collector in a wider plain: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted." These words have been used by Jesus in an earlier parable (Luke 14:7–11) that spoke of taking the lowest place when one is invited to a meal. In humbling ourselves, we let God take a free hand in bringing us higher. We find this a constant theme in Luke, where we find a lot of these "reversals"—of blessings for the poor and woes for the rich, of Lazarus at the bosom of Abraham and the rich man suffering torment, and now, the tax collector justified by God and the Pharisee not justified. The words of Mary in the *Magnificat* are a fitting summary: "He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones, but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty" (Luke 1:52–53).

Questions for meditation:

1. ***What disposition do I have whenever I pray to God? Is the manner of my prayer more like that of the Pharisee or of the tax collector?***
2. ***Do I take time to examine my conscience and make an act of contrition? Do I seek to make every celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (as penitent or as minister) meaningful and fruitful?***

3. ORATIO. What do we say to the Lord, motivated by His Word?

This is the time for invocation. Prayer is responding to God after having listened to him. It is our assent to his will and his plan for us. Saint Augustine says, "Your prayer is talking to God. When you read Sacred Scripture, God speaks to you; when you pray, you speak to God." We spend about 5 minutes in silence lifting our words to God.

After our moment of silence, we shall altogether say Psalm 34:2–23:

- ² I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall be always in my mouth.**
- ³ My soul will glory in the Lord;
let the poor hear and be glad.**
- ⁴ Magnify the Lord with me;
and let us exalt his name together.**
- ⁵ I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
delivered me from all my fears.**
- ⁶ Look to him and be radiant,
and your faces may not blush for shame.**
- ⁷ This poor one cried out and the Lord heard,
and from all his distress he saved him.**
- ⁸ The angel of the Lord encamps
around those who fear him, and he saves them.**
- ⁹ Taste and see that the Lord is good;
blessed is the stalwart one who takes refuge in him.**
- ¹⁰ Fear the Lord, you his holy ones;
nothing is lacking to those who fear him.**
- ¹¹ The rich grow poor and go hungry,
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.**
- ¹² Come, children, listen to me;
I will teach you fear of the Lord.**
- ¹³ Who is the man who delights in life,
who loves to see the good days?**
- ¹⁴ Keep your tongue from evil,
your lips from speaking lies.**
- ¹⁵ Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.**
- ¹⁶ The eyes of the Lord are directed toward the righteous
and his ears toward their cry.**
- ¹⁷ The Lord's face is against evildoers
to wipe out their memory from the earth.**
- ¹⁸ The righteous cry out, the Lord hears
and he rescues them from all their afflictions.**
- ¹⁹ The Lord is close to the brokenhearted,
saves those whose spirit is crushed.**
- ²⁰ Many are the troubles of the righteous,
but the Lord delivers him from them all.**
- ²¹ He watches over all his bones;
not one of them shall be broken.**
- ²² Evil will slay the wicked;
those who hate the righteous are condemned.**
- ²³ The Lord is the redeemer of the souls of his servants;
and none are condemned who take refuge in him.**

4. CONTEMPLATIO. What conversion is asked for by the contemplation of the Lord?

Having lifted our prayers to the Lord, we simply rest in His presence. He has used his Word to invite us to accept His transforming embrace. Let his words linger, ever now as we feel him in his wordless, quiet presence. Let the rest of our week, especially those moments that we choose to spend in silence, be a time to simply enjoy the experience of being in the presence of God.