

Homily 30th Sunday Year C October 23 2016

The Pilgrim Prayer known as Jesus Prayer, “*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner,*” originated from the tax collector’s prayer, “*O God, be merciful to me a sinner.*” Jesus Prayer is a mantra prayer recited by the monastic desert fathers from the 5th century.

The tax collector recognized his sinfulness and prayed to God for mercy. The Pharisee who claimed he had no sin, and not like the rest of humanity (‘holier than thou’) took his position and spoke his prayer to himself. The Gospel tells us that the tax collector went home justified in the sight of God. That is to say, God forgave him his sins. But the Pharisee left the temple not justified. His sins remained with him. He, even, committed more sins while in the temple: He despised the rest of humanity and the tax collector. And he did that right in the temple! The Pharisee was self-righteous and full of himself. He spent the time in the temple glorifying himself and not God.

A person may have exaggerated sense of self worth and excessive pride of one’s achievements, but low in the eyes of people and in the eyes of God. Jesus made it very clear in today’s Gospel, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

We are, today, encouraged to keep away from vices such as pride, arrogance, lack of humility, disrespecting and despising others. Such vices not only spoil our relationship with one another, the vices spoil our relationship with God. Wisdom 1:3, “Dishonest thoughts separate people from God...” Proverbs 8:13, “I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.” Proverbs 11:12, “He who despises his neighbor lacks sense.” Proverbs 14:21, “He who despises his neighbor sins.” Matthew 5:22, “... Whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.” Psalm 5:5, “The arrogant cannot stand in your presence.” Luke 1:53, “The hungry he has filled with good things; and the rich he has sent away empty.”

What can we learn from the tax collector and his prayer? 2 Chronicle 7:14, “If my people who bear my name humble themselves, and pray and look for me, and turn from their wicked ways, then I myself will hear from heaven and forgive their sins and restore their land.” James 4:6, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” James 4:10, “Humble yourself before the Lord and he will exalt you.” 1Pet 5:6, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

The first reading says, “The prayer of the lowly (*the humble*) pierces the clouds, it does not rest till it reaches its goal...” Its goal is the Throne of Mercy. Today’s Psalm says, “The Lord hears the prayer of the poor (*in spirit*).” The Psalm says, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; those who are crushed in spirit he saves.” Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven.”

Fr Martin Eke, MSP