

## **THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

*Gospel: Luke 18:9-14*

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

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 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. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ 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!’ 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.”

### **REFLECTION 1: A PROUD PHARISEE AND A HUMBLE TAX-COLLECTOR**

Pope Francis’ first action on being elected pope was to remain on the ground floor with everyone else rather than climb the steps to the throne from which past popes received the pledges of the cardinals. His first words to the faithful were a call to pray for him. Pope Francis has focused his attention on the poor. He doesn’t live in the papal apartments but rather in the Casa Sancta Marta residence beside the Vatican where he eats his meals in the company of low-ranking priests and visitors.

Today’s Gospel contrasts a proud Pharisee and a humble tax collector as they come to pray in the Temple. Jesus uses that story to teach us that those who exalt themselves will be humbled and the ones who humble themselves will be uplifted. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is one of Luke’s perceptive parables. It makes us stop and ponder doing the classic thing of turning things upside down. The ‘bad’ person goes home at right with God, while the ‘good’ person does not. So, let’s have a look at both men. The Pharisee is concerned only with keeping rules and regulations and does not relate to God as God expects him to relate. Though he can boast, ‘I am not like the rest of humanity – greedy, dishonest, adulterous – or even like this tax collector’. His claim for justification revolves around fasting twice a week and paying tithes on his total income. He begins with the word ‘I’ and he uses this word six times in a prayer of just 39 words. For the Pharisee, prayer is about himself. On the other hand, the tax collector begins with ‘God’, and his prayer of seven words has a stark honesty about it – it is totally concerned with God. His whole focus is on what God has done, on what God is doing and on what God will do. Our great prayer that is the Mass is also completely God-focused.

In many ways the tax collector is religiously trapped. Working for the Roman army of occupation, he is not only a traitor to his country and his people; he’s offending in ways that leave little wiggle room. He lives and works in a corrupt environment. There is also a reason he stood far off at a distance. As a public sinner he is not even allowed to enter the temple proper. He’s probably forced to pray in the court of the Gentiles – an area reserved for non-Jews. However, it isn’t what they see and hear that’s important; it’s how they see and hear. We’re now expected to make a 180-degree mental shift to see and hear what God sees and hears. The Pharisee really didn’t go to pray, he went to inform God how good he was. The tax collector’s heartbroken, self-despising prayer won him acceptance before God. Eventually it all depends on our focus of comparison and when we place our lives alongside the holiness of God, all that is left for us to say is, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’.