

## **The Pharisee and the Tax-Collector** (30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

### **Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18—God Hears the Prayer of the Humble**

1. Poor Man: God will “listen” to “the prayer of one who is wronged” (35:13)
2. Humble: “prayer of the humble pierces the clouds” (35:17)

### **Psalms 34—The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor**

1. Broken-Hearted: “the LORD is near to the broken-hearted” (v. 18)
2. Crushed: and to the “crushed in spirit” (v. 18; cf. Matt 5:3, “poor in spirit”)

### **2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18—The Crown of Righteousness**

1. Crown of Righteousness: the Lord will “award” to me on the day of judgment (4:8)

### **Luke 18:9-14—The Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

1. Parable for the Proud:
  - a. Self-Trust: “trust” or “have confidence” (Greek *peithō*) in “themselves”
  - b. Self-Righteous: that they are “righteous” (Greek *dikaios*) (Luke 18:19)
  - c. Arrogance: “despise” or “disdain” (Greek *exoutheneō*) others (Luke 18:9)
2. Twist: Pharisees widely respected as pious and prayerful:

[The Pharisees] are, as a matter of fact, *extremely influential among the townsfolk*; and all prayers and sacred rites of divine worship are performed according to their exposition. This is the great tribute that the inhabitants of the cities, by *practicing the highest ideals* both in their way of living and in their discourse, have paid to *the excellence of the Pharisees*. (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.15; trans. L. H. Feldman, LCL)

3. Twist: Tax-Collectors: widely despised as public sinner/thieves (cf. Luke 3:12)
3. Two Kinds of Prayer:

#### *The Pharisee's Prayer*

1. Close: stands in the Temple, (implied) front of Outer Court
2. Proud: sees himself as “righteous”
3. Judges Others: sins of others; “Extortioners, unjust, adulterers... tax collector”
4. Prays to Himself: prays “to himself” (Greek *pros heauton*)
5. Not Forgiven: not forgiven

#### *The Tax-Collector's Prayer*

1. Far: stands “far off”; (rear of Outer Court)
2. Humble: beats his “breast”
3. Judges Himself: focuses on the fact the he is “a sinner”
4. Prays to God: prays to “God”
5. Forgiven: goes home “justified”

5. Self-Exaltation: everyone who “exalts” (Greek *hypsōō*) himself will be “humbled” or “brought low” or “humiliated (Greek *tapeinoō*) (Luke 18:14; cf. Luke 14:11; Matt 23:12)

### The Catechism on Humility in Prayer

“Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.” But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or “out of the depths” of a humble and contrite heart?<sup>3</sup> He who humbles himself will be exalted; *humility is the foundation of prayer*. Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. “Man is a beggar before God.” (CCC 2559, citing St. John Damascene and St. Augustine)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1. Why do you think the prayer of the poor and humble is so powerful in Sirach?

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2. What is the twist in Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector?

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3. Have you ever struggled with praying “to yourself” rather than “to God”? What are some practical ways to pray more like the tax-collector?

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### For Further Study

1. Arthur A. Just, Jr. *Luke*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament III. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003. Pp. 278-80
3. Pablo Gadenz. *The Gospel of Luke*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. Pp. 303-305.