

XI TRINITY 2019
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
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They say once you've visited Alaska it gets into your blood and you will want to go back again and again. During the nine years I travelled to Juneau to celebrate Mass for the people of Saint George's Mission...I learned to respect and appreciate the land and its people.

It was during a family vacation to Alaska in 2003 we enjoyed an evening of dinner and entertainment at Denali National Park. The entertainment was a musical about the first expedition to successfully climb Mt. McKinley (Denali). And it was during the show I first heard the name, Hudson Stuck, Archdeacon of the Yukon. He's been the subject of several sermons.

Hudson Stuck was born in 1863 in Paddington, London, and immigrated to the United States in 1885. He settled in Texas and worked as a cowboy and schoolteacher before entering seminary. He was ordained an Anglican priest in 1892 and served rural Parishes in Texas.

Father Stuck was like Saint Paul a man of action. In 1896 he became Dean of the Cathedral in Dallas. He founded a night school for millworkers and a home of indigent women. He preached against the disenfranchisement and rampant lynching of African-Americans. In 1903 largely through his efforts, Texas became the first state to pass child labor laws.

In 1904, Father Stuck became Archdeacon for Alaska and the Yukon Territory. He documents his work as a priest visiting missions in his book *Ten Thousand Miles with a Dog Sled*. Remember there were no roads, no cars and no airplanes. In 1913 he co-led the first successful ascent of Mt. McKinley (Denali), which he documents in his book *The Ascent of Denali*. Both books are well worth reading.

Now that we know something about Father Stuck's background, let's turn our attention to the Gospel...the Pharisee and the Publican...or the Lawyer and the Tax Collector. In 1916, Father Stuck was asked to deliver the sermon at the Baccalaureate Service at Columbia University in New York. The sermon was based on today's Gospel. He asked the graduates whether they considered themselves to be professionals or amateurs.

The question was posed to men about to begin their professional lives of serving others as doctors, lawyers, social workers, scientists, priests and teachers. According to Father Stuck, the Gospel asks all of us to consider the same question. When it comes to matters of our Faith, do we consider ourselves **professionals** or **amateurs**? The answer might surprise us!

It ultimately has to do with our attitude toward God, toward ourselves and toward others. Do we think we are better than everyone else because we go to Mass every Sunday and support the parish? Do we think we know everything there is to know about our faith and want God to thank us for being such good people? Are we like the lawyer in today's Gospel...he thinks he's the **professional** religious person.

Before we answer the question we need to understand the lawyer in the Gospel is being truthful about his commitment to God and his religion. The problem is his attitude toward the tax collector he considers a low-life collaborator working for the government and against his own people.

The tax collector in the Gospel admits his faults and sins and can't even bring himself to look up at God. All he can do is bow his head and say to God, "Yes, I'm the **amateur** here. Sometimes I don't get the truth of my faith. Please show me some mercy. I don't know what else to say." Jesus tells us the tax guy went home justified...in a correct relationship with God. And that's exactly where we want to be!

Father Stuck, like Saint Paul, had no tolerance for people who used their wealth, fame or position in life to impress others. He held a particular disdain for people within the Church who set themselves apart from others because they were richer, better educated, had the best-looking children, or lived in the right Zip Code.

Father Stuck returned to Alaska and died there from pneumonia in 1920. He is buried in Fort Yukon. He was content being the amateur missionary priest serving native Alaskans and others...whether in a church building or from the back of a dog sled. We learn from him and from Saint Paul it's really OK to admit to God and to ourselves...we're **amateurs**!

It's all about our attitude...let's make sure ours are in the right place.

