

XI Trinity 2020
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
I Cor. 15.1-11 St. Luke 18.9-14



“When you pray”, Jesus said, “Say this: ‘Father, may your holy name be honored.’ ”

We’ve learned from our previous studies the word the KJV and all other versions of the Bible translates as “Father”...comes from the Aramaic “Abba”. It is the intimate, personal way we call God...the same name Jesus calls him...more like “Papa”...and at the same time we give God the honor due him.

The Parable of the Lawyer and the Tax Collector is about prayer...specifically about our attitude toward God and others when we pray. It follows another short and seldom-heard parable about prayer...The Parable of the Widow and the Judge.

A widow asks the judge to help her resolve a case against her opponent. The judge was known to neither “fear God nor respect people.” The widow doesn’t back down and eventually the corrupt judge gives her what she wants. Jesus tells this short parable to teach us to be persistent in our prayers and never become discouraged. God hears and answers our prayers. This short parable is the perfect lead into today’s Gospel.

In the Parable of the Lawyer and the Tax Collector we meet two very different men who come to the Temple to pray. The Lawyer thinks highly of himself and his own accomplishments and is certain of his own goodness in God’s eyes. The Lawyer sees the Tax Collector and distances himself from him. He stands up front to pray while the Tax Collector stays in the back.

The Lawyer thanks God for not making him like everyone else. Everything he says about himself is true: he’s not greedy or dishonest; he hasn’t committed adultery; he fasts and tithes...all good things. The problem is the Lawyer thinks God should congratulate him for doing what he should always be doing anyway. His prayer becomes disingenuous and dishonest when he criticizes the Tax Collector. The Lawyer dishonors God in condemning the Tax Collector as a sinner and ignoring his own sinful nature.

What about the Tax Collector? We know from the story he is a Jew. The Lawyer may have a good reason to dislike him. Tax Collectors were not known for their honesty. He also is considered a traitor for collaborating with the Roman Occupation in collecting taxes from his own people.

We don’t know from the story why this man became a Tax Collector and that ultimately isn’t important. What is important is his attitude toward God and others. He stays in the back of the Temple and can’t even bring himself to look up to heaven. He can only ask God to take pity on him, a sinner. His prayer is honest and sincere and shows humility toward God. He honors God!

It’s as important how we pray, as it is who and what we pray for. And the Lord’s Prayer is our tutorial in how to pray. *The Book of Common Prayer* also gives us guidance in *A Prayer for All Conditions of Men* from Morning and Evening Prayer: We are to pray for “all those who are in any ways afflicted, or distressed, in mind, body or estate.” And in the *Prayer for the Church at Mass* we pray for “all those who are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity.”

We should always thank God for the many blessings he gives us. We should always pray he will continue to guide us in our work. We should always pray for evildoers throughout the world...that God will change their hearts from doing evil things into doing good things. We must pray for government leaders even if we disagree with their politics. We must even pray for people we don’t like...and must not be judgmental. We must always pray for peace in the world.

There is something of both the Lawyer and the Tax Collector in each of us. We do sometimes think we are morally or spiritually better than everyone else. When we pray we should always approach God with the kind of open heart and mind and humility of the Tax Collector. And we must be persistent.

Let’s start with the simplest petition from the Lord’s Prayer...God forgive me a sinner...help me to do better...and he will. Freed from the burden of our sins...we can then go home right with God.

