

XI Trinity 2022
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
I Cor. 15.1-11 St. Luke 18.9-14



Welcome to How to Pray 101. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus replied, this is how you should pray...

...Our Father in heaven, may your holy name be honored: may your kingdom come: may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need. Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us. Do not bring us to hard testing. But keep us from the Evil One.

The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of all prayers. It is the standard for all other prayers. When we find ourselves searching for what to pray...we can remember Jesus' own words..."This is how you should pray."

This morning's Gospel is the familiar Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Lawyer and Tax Collector). The word *Pharisee* means "separated one". The Pharisees prided themselves on their strict observance of the Law. But they also worked hard to preserve the oral tradition within Judaism, which they considered important in helping people understand the Law.

Publicans were "public servants". In the Gospel, the Publican is a Tax Collector. He was a Jew under contract with the Roman Government to collect taxes...from his own people. Because he worked for a pagan government and handled pagan money...he would have been considered unclean and a traitor by his own people.

In the Gospels, Jesus' encounters with the Pharisees are usually negative. It's important for us to remember not all Pharisees were of the self-righteous type portrayed in the Parable. Jesus is giving us the worst-case scenario in the Pharisee/Lawyer of how not to pray.

The Lawyer thinks highly of himself and his own accomplishments and is certain of his own goodness in God's eyes. He has set up a standard of behavior for himself and others. He expects others to notice him and despises others who don't or can't live up to his own standards of behavior.

Let's take a closer look at the Lawyer's prayer. He starts his prayer by thanking God that he is not greedy, dishonest or an adulterer...like everyone else. He thanks God he is not like "that tax collector over there". He boasts he fasts twice a week and gives ten percent of his income to God. His prayer is disingenuous and dishonest...when he compares himself to others...especially to the tax collector.

What about the Tax Collector? The Lawyer may have had a good reason to dislike the Tax Collector. What he doesn't know is what is in the Tax Collector's heart. Jesus doesn't tell us in the story why he became a tax collector...ultimately that isn't important. Our tax collector friend stands in the back of the Temple...and can't bring himself to even look up to heaven. All he can say is, "God, have pity on me, a sinner." He has just expressed his total reliance on God's mercy.

The Parable of the Pharisee/Lawyer and Publican/Tax Collector is a lesson in how to pray. Prayer takes many forms: thanksgiving, petition, intercessory, sorrow, repentance and joy. There are elements of all of these types of prayer woven throughout the Mass.

The Parable teaches us how we pray is just as important as what we pray. Like all other blessings from God...prayer is a gift from God. Our prayers to God must come from the heart. We can and should pray for others and their needs. We can and should pray that he will turn the hearts of evildoers in the world from doing evil things into doing good things.

We must pray for government leaders even if we don't like their politics. We must even pray for people we don't like...and must not be judgmental in our prayers. We must always pray for peace in the world. When we pray we should always approach God with the kind of open heart and mind and humility of the Tax Collector.

Jesus has given us the perfect prayer...let's start by thanking him for the good things he has given us and ask him to...*forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us...*and to help us to do better...and he will.

We can then go home right with God.

