

XI Trinity 2024  
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*I Cor. 15.1-11 St. Luke 18.9-14*



One man went home right with God...the other man did not!

This morning's Gospel is the familiar Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, or the Lawyer and the Tax Collector. Father Massey Shepherd, author of the Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary writes...

*...“In this parable, the contrast made between the Pharisee and the publican in their respective prayers is not between hypocrisy and humility--for the Pharisee was not hypocritical in his prayer. Everything he said was true. His condemnation lay in his presumption of making an equation between his own good works and the exalted righteousness of God. The publican, however, realized immeasurable difference between God's holiness and his own abasement. No equitable justice, but only the infinity of divine compassion, could balance the equation.”*

Jesus tells us in the Gospel this parable is directed at certain people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everyone else. The word *Pharisee* means “separated one”. They separated themselves not only in their strict religious observances and teachings, but from everyone they considered beneath them.

The Pharisee/Lawyer in the Gospel goes to the Temple to pray. He “stood apart”, he distanced himself from the Publican/Tax Collector. He thanks God for making him better than everyone else. He's not greedy or dishonest. He hasn't committed adultery. He tithes. And he thanks God for not making him a low-life tax collector like the guy in the back of the Temple. The problem with the Pharisee/Lawyer's prayer is not what he says. The problem is how he prays and who he thinks has put in him in a right relationship with God.

Publicans were “public servants” who worked for the Roman Government collecting taxes. The fact the Publican/Tax Collector is praying in the Temple tells us he is a Jew. That put him at odds with his own people, since he was collecting taxes from them for a

pagan government. He would have been considered a traitor to his own people.

Our Publican/Tax Collector friend also separates himself from the Pharisee/Lawyer. He does this not because he thinks he is better or morally superior in God's eyes to the Pharisee/Lawyer. He does this because he knows he is a sinner and completely dependent upon God's mercy and compassion. He knows he is put right with God because of God's desire to forgive him, not because of his own actions.

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. Our prayers to God must be honest and 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. And we should pray for those who have no one else to pray for them.

If we are looking for the most perfect prayer, Jesus has already given that to us...

*...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.*

Our lives are all about prayer. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul tells us we should pray in the Spirit at all times, with every kind of prayer and petition. And our prayers must be sincere and we must acknowledge God is the One who shows us love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

We can then go home in a right relationship with God, because he has made us right.

