

**SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE,
JANUARY 15/28, 2007**

2 TIMOTHY 3: 10-15

ST. LUKE 18: 10-14

by

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: *Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.*

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Self Love

Here the Lord warns of pride, the exaltation of self rather than the requisite humility. The publican had it, the Pharisee did not. The latter emphasises his good deeds, but he is full of self-love, a particularly bad form of pride. Following the Fathers, St. Theophylact puts it this way:

But the most destructive of all these kinds of self-love is pride, for pride is contempt of God. When a man ascribes his accomplishments to himself, and not to God, this is nothing less than *denial of God* and opposition to Him. Therefore, like enemy to enemy, the Lord opposes this passion which is opposed to Him, and through this parable He promises to heal it. He directs this parable to those who trust in *themselves and who do not attribute everything to God, and who, as a result, despise others*. He shows that when righteousness, which is marvelous in every other respect and sets a man close to God, takes pride as its companion, it casts that man into the lowest depths and *makes demonic* what was God-like just a short time before (all emphases supplied).¹

The Pharisee At First Appears ‘Wise,’ But Then he Shows His True Colours

He starts out with “God, I thank Thee,” but thereafter his words are full of pride and arrogance. He did not really mean that he was thanking God for His assistance. Rather, he demonstrates by his posture his “haughtiness and lack of humility”. By his bearing, he displays his pride.² The Pharisee attributes his deeds to himself and not to God:

He did not say, (I thank Thee) for that Thou didst create me, O Lord, and by Thy help I am kept free from all injustice, extortion and other evils; rather, he thought that he accomplished all his good deeds by his own power. Let every man, then, be apprised that without God’s help he cannot perform anything good. As Christ says, Without me ye can do nothing (St. John 15: 5).... Even though we have been honoured with free will, without help from God on high we still cannot do a single good deed in the course of this life.³

The Pharisee is judgmental towards other men including the publican, and he extols his virtues of tithing and fasting. But tithing and fasting will not count for anything when vanity and pride enter the picture. The Jews used to combine tithes so that they ended up giving away half their property. But even if a man gives up half his property, it will count for nothing if he is vain and proud:

If, then, a man gives away half of his property, and it counts for nothing, because he is vain and puffed up with pride, how much more is this true of one who does not even give up a tenth; what does he deserve if he is vain and puffed up with pride? Moreover, the holy Gospel says: Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (St. Matthew 5: 20).⁴

Now Consider The Publican

Notice instead of standing proud, he was stooped in posture and not lifting his eyes unto heaven; whereas, the Pharisee stood proud and tall before heaven in “boastful exaltation”.⁵ The publican had no good deeds to recount, so he beat his breast, approached God with contrition and threw himself on God’s mercy “God be merciful to me a sinner”. This is what God wants to hear from us. The publican’s humility wipes away all his sins; whereas, the Pharisee’s virtues are obliterated by his pride:

Thus, humility purges away all sins, whereas pride ruins all virtues, for pride is greater and graver than any sin or wickedness. It is a greater thing for sinners to be converted and to humble themselves than for those who practice virtue to be puffed up with pride.⁶

Our sins can be cured through sincere heartfelt repentance:

We will not be punished or condemned in the age to be because we have sinned, since we were given a mutable and unstable nature. But we will be punished if, after sinning, we did not repent and turn from our evil ways to the Lord; for we have been given the *power* (emphasis supplied) to repent, as well as the time in which to do so. Only through repentance shall we receive God's mercy, and not its opposite, His passionate anger. Not that God is angry with us: He is angry with evil.⁷

The publican approached God with "compunction of heart". He "stood afar off" and distanced himself in his demeanour:

He was ashamed to lift up his eyes to heaven, for he considered his eyes *unworthy* (emphasis supplied) of heavenly vision because they had desired to see and to enjoy the good things of earth.⁸

The publican displayed humility whereas the Pharisee "fell from honour into the pit of dishonour by justifying himself and condemning the publican and other people".⁹ He did not judge the Pharisee; yet, the latter judged him..."*that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican*". What was the publican's response to the Pharisee's condemnation? He did the Christian thing. He did not retaliate. Instead, he threw himself upon God's mercy beseeching Him to be merciful to him.

What can we take away from the Gospel today to make our lives more spiritually meaningful? Everything in it! This parable, though relatively short, is chockfull of spiritual meaning. We should concentrate on two things: (1) recognising our own sins and (2) forgiving the sins of others. We should judge ourselves, not our neighbours:

Let us, then, put away exacting examination and judgment of others, brethren, and let us rather be concerned about ourselves. And if we see others sinning, let us not judge them, but rather set our own sins before our eyes, regarding our sins as worse than those of others.... Humbling ourselves, then, let us judge only ourselves and be ashamed of ourselves, that we may not be condemned on the day of the just judgement. Let us love humility, for by it the publican was justified and relieved of his sins. Let us hate arrogance, because by it the Pharisee was brought down and lost the good works which he had done.¹⁰

Trust in the Lord, throw ourselves at His feet, recognise our sins, ask forgiveness and judge others not!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 235.

² *ibid.*

³ See Hieromonk German Ciuba, (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, pp. 5-6..

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵ Bl. Theophylact, *op.cit.*, p. 235.

⁶ Ciuba, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

⁷ St. Theognostos, *On the Practice of the Virtues, Contemplation and the Priesthood*, in *The Philokalia, Volume Two* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Macarios of Corinth), #47, pp. 369-370.

⁸ Bl. Theophylact, *op.cit.*, p. 237.

⁹ Ciuba, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁰ *id.*, pp. 9-10.