

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time



The two go up to the temple to pray,
but each carries in his heart his own image of God
and his own way of relating to him.
The Pharisee remains entangled in a legalistic religion:
for him, the important thing is to be
in good standing with God
and to be more observant than anyone else.
The tax collector, on the other hand,
opens himself to the God of Love
that Jesus preaches:
he has learned to live by forgiveness,
without boasting about anything
and without condemning anyone.

Reading 1 Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

The LORD is a God of justice, who knows no favorites.

Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.

The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.

The one who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens.

The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal, nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, judges justly and affirms the right, and the Lord will not delay

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23

R. The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad. **R.**

The LORD confronts the evildoers,
to destroy remembrance of them from the earth.
When the just cry out, the LORD hears them,
and from all their distress he rescues them. **R.**

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.
The LORD redeems the lives of his servants;
no one incurs guilt who takes refuge in him.

Reading 2 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Beloved:

I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.

From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance.

At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me.

May it not be held against them!

But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

And I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom.

To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Luke 18:9-14

Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else.

"Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity -- greedy, dishonest, adulterous -- or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'



But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.' I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

FOR THE UNACCEPTABLE ONES

There's a phrase of Jesus that undoubtedly reflects a conviction and a style of acting that surprised and scandalized his contemporaries: «The healthy have no need of a doctor, but the sick do...I haven't come to call the righteous, but the sinners». The fact is historical: Jesus didn't direct himself to the pious sectors, but to the unworthy and the undesirables.

The reason is simple. Jesus quickly grasped that his message is superfluous for those who live secure and satisfied in their own religion. The «righteous» hardly have a sensation of being in need of «salvation». Enough for them is the tranquility that is handed out to them when they feel themselves worthy before God and before the consideration of others.

Jesus says it graphically: someone who is full of health and strength doesn't think about going to a doctor. Why do they need God's forgiveness, those who feel themselves innocent in the depth of their being? How are they going to be grateful for God's immense love and inexhaustible understanding - those who feel themselves «protected» by God for their scrupulous observance of God's laws?

The one who feels herself a sinner lives out a different experience. She has clear consciousness of her poverty. She knows that she can't present herself with sufficient dignity before anyone; much less before God; or even before her very self. What can she do except hope for God's forgiveness in everything? Where is she going to find salvation, if not abandoning herself trustingly to God's infinite love?

I'm not sure who will end up reading these lines. In these moments I think about those who feel yourselves incapable of living according to the norms that society imposes; you who don't have the energy to live out the moral ideal that religion establishes; you who are trapped in a contemptable life; you who don't dare to look into the eyes of your spouse or your children; you who leave the prison to return to it once again; you who can't escape prostitution... Don't ever forget it: Jesus has come for you.

When you see yourselves judged by the Law, feel yourselves understood by God; when you see yourselves rejected by society, know that God welcomes you; when no one forgives your indignity, feel God's unfailing forgiveness. You don't deserve it. No one of us deserves it. But that's the way God is: love and forgiveness. You can enjoy it and be thankful. Don't ever forget it: according to Jesus, the only one who left the temple cleansed was that publican who beat his breast saying: «O God, be merciful to this sinner».

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