

## Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time - October 23, 2022

Deacon Steve Livingston

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus teaches us about the evils of pride ... that **first** among the seven deadly sins and, indeed, the first and oldest of **all** sins.

It was pride that led Lucifer to decide that **he** was **equal** to his creator ... leading him to **rebel** against his God. It was pride that caused our first parents to eat the forbidden fruit of the "**Tree of Knowledge**" after the serpent promised that they would become **like** God. And it is pride that ... by its very **definition** ... causes all our **other** sins because it is **pride** that prompts us to choose **our** will over God's will.

Oh the Pharisee in our parable was **scrupulous** in his observance of the law. He did **everything** he was supposed to do. He even **exceeded** the requirements of the law. His prayer gave lip service to thanking God ... but he was not really **thanking** God so much as **boasting** to God about how wonderful he was! He had no charity, love or humility. He was vain and conceited ... seeing no need to examine **his** conscience ... but he had no problem sharing with God his **opinion** of the faults and failings of others.

So it follows ... of course ... that he was also judgemental. How could **any** of his fellow men possibly compare with **him**? He was good and pure and "not like the rest of humanity - greedy, dishonest, adulterous". And of course he knew that **he** was **certainly** superior to this tax collector. Tax collectors collected taxes for the hated Romans and therefore were **universally** despised.

The tax collector ... on the other hand ... paid no attention to the pharisee or anyone else ... but concerned himself only with his own faults and failings. He "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.'" He had thoroughly examined his conscience ... not an easy thing ... and he recognized his sinfulness. He was penitent and humble. He knew he needed God's grace and forgiveness. And he knew that he did not **deserve** either and that he was **completely** reliant on God's mercy. He made **no** attempt to justify himself before God ... but simply ... humbly ... asked for God's mercy and

forgiveness. And Jesus tells us he “went home **justified**” ... but the Pharisee did **not** ... “for whoever exalts **himself** will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted”!

Now we are **certainly** called upon by our God to make judgments about right and wrong ... every day ... and God gives us the tools to do this. He has given us the ten commandments and the lessons Jesus taught us by the example he modeled throughout His life on earth and by His teachings through these parables for example. But he has **not** given us the mission of judging our fellow man. That is **God’s** job ... not ours! We received a sterling example of this nine years ago when Pope Francis asked: “Who am I to judge?” ... a statement for which he was roundly criticized! Following Jesus’ teaching will **rarely** make us popular.

So ... when we look into that internal mirror that we call a conscience ... if indeed we **do** look ... who do we see? Do we see a tax collector or a pharisee? And how do we tell?

Do we see someone who believes that his successes in life were due only to his own merits alone ... without acknowledging help from God or anyone else? Do we see someone who makes judgements about others based on race or ethnicity ... religion or political affiliation ... or socio-economic status or whatever? If we do ... we might just be seeing a pharisee ... and if we do see a pharisee ... we **might** just be badly in need ... of a life saving dose of humility ... because if we don’t learn humility in this life ... we will **certainly** be humbled in the next!