

Homily for 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Two men. Two men come to the temple to pray. One is a respected member of the community...the other, well, tax-collectors have never been held in high esteem. And here's what is truly interesting. Jesus never challenges or denies the truth of what the story tells us about each of these men. Jesus neither diminishes the deeds of the Pharisee nor white-washes the actions of the Tax Collector. As far as the Gospel is concerned, both of these individuals are exactly what they seem to be. The Pharisee does and has done everything that he claims. And the tax collector has been an agent of Rome and an unloved member of the Jewish community.

So, what is important in this story is not the autobiographical content of each person. What is important is the demeanor of each person before God.

For the Pharisee this is an exercise in self-congratulation. The Pharisee approaches God with "head unbowed." He approaches God with utter confidence. He's good...he knows he's good...he just wants to make sure that God knows it too.

The Tax Collector, on the other hand, is humbled in the presence of God. The Tax Collector cannot even raise his eyes. Perhaps,

for the first time, this Tax Collector is able to look at his life with a clarity he has never had before. He can see all that he has done wrong and he weeps ... he weeps with sadness. Sadness because he comprehends that to be in the presence of God is to come before the one person who knows our weaknesses and who loves us and forgives us out of sheer love.

The Gospel today wants to teach us that God calls us not to look down on others, as this Pharisee looked down on the Tax Collector. Rather the Word of God calls us to look more humbly at our own lives, to realize the mercy of God at work in our hearts and to bring that love to those whom God places in our lives. I fear the Pharisee will always be with us. But I hope and pray that the Tax Collector will teach us to look humbly at our own lives and open our hearts to the endless and forgiving love of God.