

30th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C

(Sir 35:12-14, 16-18; 2 Tm 4:6-8, 16-18; Lk 18:9-14)

Excerpts from Pope Francis' Homily – 27 October 2019

by Father Charles Fillion

26 October 2025

Brothers & sisters, the readings today give us three ways of praying. The way of the Pharisee, the tax collector, and the prayer of a poor person. The *prayer of the Pharisee* begins in this way: “God, I thank you”. This is a great beginning, because the best prayer is that of gratitude, that of praise. However, we see the reason why he gives thanks: “that I am not like other men” (Lk 18:11). He also explains the reason: he fasts twice a week, and he pays tithes on all that he has. In short, he boasts because he fulfils particular commandments to the best degree possible. But he forgets the greatest commandment: *to love God and our neighbour* (cf. Mt 22:36-40).

He is focused only on himself. The tragedy of this man is that he is without love. He ends up praising himself instead of praying. In fact, he asks nothing from the Lord because he does not feel needy, but he feels that God owes something to him. He stands in the temple of God, but he worships a different god: *himself*. Together with God, he forgets his neighbour; indeed, he despises him. For the Pharisee, his neighbour has no worth, no value. He considers himself better than others.

How many times do we see this happening over and over again in life and history! How many times do those who are prominent, making other people feel even more rejected. They despise their traditions, erase their history, occupy their lands, and seize their goods. How much alleged superiority, transformed into oppression and exploitation, exists even today!

Worship of self carries on hypocritically with its rites and “prayers”, forgetting the true worship of God which is always expressed in love of one's neighbour. Even Christians who pray and go to Mass on Sunday are subject to this religion of the self. Let us pray for the grace not to consider ourselves superior, not to believe that we are alright, not to become cynical and scornful. Let us ask Jesus to heal us of speaking ill and complaining about others, of despising this or that person: these things are displeasing to God.

The *prayer of the tax collector* helps us understand what is pleasing to God. He does not begin from his own merits but from his shortcomings, not from his riches but from his poverty. No, he was not poor money wise. Tax collectors were wealthy and tended to make money unjustly at the expense of their fellow citizens. But he, on the other hand, felt a poverty of life, because we never live well in sin. The tax collector who exploited others admitted being poor before God, and the Lord heard his prayer, a mere seven words but an expression of heartfelt sincerity. In fact, while the Pharisee stood in front on his feet (cf. v. 11), the tax collector stood far off and “would not even lift up his eyes to heaven”, because he believed that God is indeed great, while he knew himself to be small.

His prayer is born straight from the heart; it is transparent. He places his heart before God, not outward appearances. To pray is to stand before God's eyes – it is God looking at me when I pray – without illusions, excuses or justifications. From God come light and truth, transparency of my heart. Today, looking at the tax collector, we rediscover where to start: from the conviction that we, all of us, are in need of salvation. This is the first step of the *true worship of God*, who is merciful towards those who admit their need.

To consider ourselves righteous is to leave God, the only righteous one, out in the cold. If we look at ourselves honestly, we see in us all both the tax collector and the Pharisee. We are a bit like the tax collectors because we are sinners, and a bit like the Pharisees because we are presumptuous, able to justify ourselves, masters of the art of self-justification. This may often work with ourselves, but not with God. Let us pray for the grace to experience ourselves in need of mercy, interiorly poor. We do well to remind ourselves that the salvation of God operates only in an atmosphere of interior poverty.

In the first reading, Sirach says the *prayer of the poor person*, “will reach to the clouds” (35:21). God is our Father and, Sirach says again, “he hears the prayer of one who is wronged” (v. 16). How many times, even in the Church, have the voices of the poor not been heard and perhaps scoffed at or silenced because they are inconvenient. Let us pray for the grace to be able to listen to the cry of the poor: this is *the cry of hope* of the Church. The cry of the poor is the Church's cry of hope. When we make their cry our own, we can be certain, our prayer too will reach to the clouds.

May this Eucharist help us to remain humble always thanking God for all that we have, so we may be truly Pilgrims of Hope. As we come to the end of October, we ask also Mother Mary to teach us humility.