

The Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

Luke 18:10-14

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 as 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. (KJV)

The current Gospel is proclaimed every year in God's Holy Church. Listeners are expected to learn from the reading each year. The Gospel is ever new and relevant with each reading.

Believers are at a different point in life with each Gospel reading. The challenge for hearers of the Gospel is to value the humility of the publican and make it a part of personal life.

It is very easy to become like the Pharisee and be judgmental of others. Focusing on the sins of others is a way to avoid the discomfort of confronting personal sin and taking corrective action.

Taking responsibility for personal sins and addressing them requires honesty in the heart, mind and soul. The desire to do better and be better in Christ necessitates honesty and acknowledgment of personal sinfulness.

The measure of a person's character is connected to honesty with the self. God knows each person's sins and each person's thoughts, actions and intentions. The Pharisee and Publican are a lesson in contrasts in their relationship with God.

The ideal relationship with God is a relationship of love. God is love. God heals in love and enables the person to grow. Sin impedes growth and detracts from the beauty of God-created life.

Sin affects the heart, mind and soul. God's merciful forgiveness and healing power are necessary for corrective change. The Pharisee failed to acknowledge his own sins. The publican knew all too well his sins and sought God's healing mercy.

The publican viewed God as good and merciful. The publican took responsibility for his actions, He desired mercy and healing. The publican was not judgmental of others. He was only concerned with the state of his own soul.

The Pharisee saw no wrong in himself. The Pharisee saw wrong in others. Personal change was not a desire of the Pharisee. He was content with what he perceived as his own goodness.

Growth in Jesus Christ is always possible. Regardless of how good and faithful we are, we remain sinners. We are always in need of God's forgiveness and mercy. We are always in need of God's love and healing.

Perfection exists only in Christ. Humans constantly commit sins. The publican's behavior teaches that when we sin, we can turn to the Lord God for forgiveness and mercy.

If we focus only on our goodness, we deny ourselves the growth that is possible through repentance of sins. We fail to avail ourselves of the power of God's love and forgiveness when we are content in the way we are.

The publican knew his sinfulness was not pleasing to God. He felt within himself that his actions were not good. He turned to God in trust and in hope for mercy. He humbled himself and was not boastful.

The love of God is ever present. God's healing power, goodness and mercy are ever present and within reach of each person. Pray and humbleness of heart are the way to reach out to God.

The Psalmist said many centuries ago: "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."^(Ps.50/51:17) The Psalmist's wisdom is lasting. The publican's example of humility is instructive.

The Pharisee was shortsighted in his vision. He did not see or acknowledge the greatness of God. He failed to credit God for any of the goodness he attributed to himself. The Pharisee credited himself with goodness. He did not credit God.

Goodness comes from and originates with God. Any good done by a person is due to God at work in the person. It is from God that the person gets the ability to do good. ^(James 1:17)

The Church is acting at this time to prepare believers for the Lenten Journey. Believers are reminded of the value of humility, repentance and seeking God's forgiveness.

The Lenten Journey requires preparation of the heart, mind and soul. Bodily readiness has a place in the journey as well. The believer's goals and values are examined carefully when the Lenten Journey is underway and taken to heart.

Personal sinfulness comes into focus during Great Lent. Self-awareness and personal honesty are prominent in the Lenten Journey being beneficial. Believers are to ready the self in the days leading to Great Lent.

Life is a constant journey from birth to departure from this life, The Kingdom of God and righteousness are the primary intended goals of the serious believer. ^(Mt.6:33)

The Holy Mysteries and Diving services in God's Holy Church enable the richness of the life in Christ. Unity with Christ is possible. Eternal life awaits the faithful. The publican points the way to turn to the Lord God in faith and in love.

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. Holy Hieromartyr Clement, Bishop of Ancyra and those with him. January 23/February 5, 2022. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic