

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)

Concern for the soul increases with the arrival of the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee. Great Lent is drawing near. The focus on personal sinfulness and repentance increases.

Each person is a sinner. Only the Lord Jesus Christ is perfect. The Church offers believers the way to reject sin in our lives and begin anew. Jesus Christ is the way to overcome sin and begin anew in life.

The present Gospel of the Publican and Pharisee compares two approaches to sin. The Pharisee saw sin as existing in others. The Pharisee was proud of himself. He was blind to his own sinfulness.

The publican knew deep within himself he was a sinner. The publican wanted mercy from Jesus Christ because of his sins. He prayed the simple prayer seeking mercy.

The Church teaches the prayer of the publican as being greatly effective. The publican's prayer has become well-known as The Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me a sinner."

When recited regularly with honesty and sincerity, The Jesus Prayer is greatly beneficial. The Jesus Prayer can be said at any time during the day or night and at any location. The Jesus Prayer is effective when said aloud or silently.

The publican took responsibility for his sins. He did not look negatively toward others. He simply wanted to correct his own life. The Pharisee did not seek change. He was satisfied with himself. The Pharisee wanted approval from God.

Listeners to the present Gospel know whether they are like the Pharisee or the publican. The present Gospel intends change in believers. Acknowledging personal sin is the first step in getting rid of the sin.

Each person coming to Church decides whether to learn more about the life in Christ and how to become more Christ-like. The Church is where to unite with Christ and to perfect the life in Christ.

Each person has a life-long battle with sin that requires being fought. Believers commit themselves to following Jesus Christ from the time of Baptism until departure from this life.

Sin becomes a part of each life and must be dealt with if the person is to enter the Kingdom of God and experience eternal life. Constant care of the soul is always important.

The Jesus Prayer offers a direct connection with Jesus Christ. The publican in his demeanor taught how to approach Jesus Christ. The publican was humble and contrite. He made his sin known to Jesus and sought mercy.

Fighting sin requires the strength and mercy of Jesus Christ. The publican realized he needed Jesus' mercy and forgiveness to get rid of his sin. The publican's humble and honest approach to Christ was to his benefit.

Believers decide whether to remain focused throughout life on seeking the Kingdom of God. Continuous and serious prayer keeps believers on the narrow path to the Kingdom.

Too often believers depart from the path to the Kingdom and engage in sin. Committing sins may be voluntary or may come about unwittingly. Living in ways pleasing to Jesus Christ is necessary in caring for the soul.

Repentance is the way to begin anew in Christ. Rejecting sin and embracing Christ has a place in each day of life. Love for Christ grows as the believer strengthens the daily relationship with Christ.

Prayer facilitates the love of Christ and following the way of Christ. The present Gospel and each Gospel lesson is a way to unite and be reunited with Christ. Focusing on the sins of others and living like the Pharisee are perilous to the soul.

Growth in Christ is expected and joyful. Beginning anew in Christ advances the quality of life. The publican experienced newness in Christ. The publican benefitted from Christ's mercy and love.

Jesus loves each person. Jesus offers the way out of the life in sin. Jesus offers the way to the Heavenly Kingdom. Believers begin the journey at baptism. Sin derails the believer unless repentance takes place.

The Church proclaims the Gospel lesson on the Publican and the Pharisees each year for believers to correct their lives while there is time. Being like the Pharisee and putting off repentance is perilous to the soul.

Seeking Christ's mercy is the way to directly experience Christ's love. When sin is forgiven, Jesus Christ's love is keenly felt. Being a sinner is perilous to the soul. Failing to repent is dangerous.

Thank God for the Gospel lesson on the Publican and the Pharisee. Thank God that Great Lent is approaching. Now is the time to think seriously about care of the soul. Now is the time to repent, seek God's mercy and experience God's love.

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. St. Meletius, Archbishop of Antioch. February 12/25, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic