

GOSPEL

LUKE 18:9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else. ‘Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, “I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get.” The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted.’

The Gospel of the Lord.

EXCERPT FROM A HOMILY FROM POPE BENEDICT XVI / 30TH SUNDAY YEAR C 2010

This morning we left the Synod Hall and came to “the temple to pray”: in this, we are touched directly by the parable of the pharisee and the publican, told by Jesus and recounted by the Evangelist St Luke (see 18:9-14). We too may be tempted, like the pharisee, to tell God of our merits, perhaps thinking of our work during these days.

However, to rise up to Heaven, prayer must emanate from a poor, humble heart. And therefore we too, at the conclusion of this ecclesial event, wish to first and foremost give thanks to God, not for our merits, but for the gift that He has given us. We recognize ourselves as small and in need of salvation, of mercy; we recognize all that comes from Him and that only with his Grace we may realize what the Holy Spirit told us. Only in this manner may we “return home” truly enriched, made more just and more able to walk in the path of the Lord.

The First Reading and the responsorial Psalm stress the theme of prayer, emphasizing that it is much more powerful to God’s heart when those who pray are in a condition of need and are afflicted. “The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds” affirms Ecclesiasticus (35:21); and the Psalmist adds: “Yahweh is near to the broken-hearted, he helps those whose spirit is crushed” (34:18).

Our thoughts go to our numerous brothers and sisters who live in the region of the Middle East and who find themselves in trying situations, at times very burdensome, both for the material poverty and for the discouragement, the state of tension and at times of fear. Today the Word of God also offers us a light of consoling hope, there where He presents prayer, personified, that “until he has eliminated the hordes of the arrogant and broken the sceptres of the wicked, until he has repaid all people as their deeds deserve and human actions as their intentions merit” (Ecc 35:21-22).

This link too, between prayer and justice makes us think of many situations in the world, particularly in the Middle East. The cry of the poor and oppressed finds an immediate echo in God, who desires to intervene to open up a way out, to restore a future of freedom, a horizon of hope.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. We are called to be saints, and part of that is humbly running to God’s mercy and examining our failings. Repentance is one of the great Christian weapons, but do do you examine and tackle personal sin seriously in your own life?
2. The pride of the pharisee is something we are all susceptible to, and so often connected to our pride is the ‘pulling down’ of others. How might you practically affirm or build others up, identifying the goodness that is in them, especially in those who you find it difficult to like or agree with?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.