

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time: The Disposition of the Poor a Doorway to Holiness

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; Psalm. 34:2-3,17-18,19,23; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke18:9-14

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

"The Lord hears the cry of the poor" (Ps 34:3). The cry of the poor has a special place in the heart of God. When God hears, God acts.

We will find one of the earliest testimonies of God hearing the poor in the early chapters of the Book of Exodus. The Israelites were in bondage and finally cried out because they could take no more. "God heard their moaning, and God was mindful of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God saw the Israelites, and God knew ..." (Exodus 2:24). And so God called on Moses to present to Pharaoh his divine mandate to free his people.

The cry of the poor is a disposition that relies unconditionally on the saving grace and God's transforming love. It is a profound disposition for entering God's mercy. God's mercy makes us worthy, not our claim of worthiness. It means that when we honestly acknowledge our need for a Savior and humbly repent our sins, our cries, tears, and pains are heard by God and are answered in due time, and sometimes in ways that we least expect.

We articulate this disposition through the Introductory Rite of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, particularly the Confiteor and Kyrie Eleison. It is a disposition praised by our Lord Jesus in this Sunday's parable.

We are told that the Pharisee and the Tax Collector went to the temple to offer prayers, but the tax collector went home justified. Although the Pharisee is a devout observer of the Law and commits himself to a life of prayer, tithing, and fasting, we might think he would easily please God with his religious practices. Yet, the Lord criticizes him. Evidently, because of his arrogance and self-righteousness in his prayer. He reports his exemplary accomplishments to God as if he's talking to an equal while despising the moral frailties of others. He behaves like a perfect individual, incapable of sinning, and separates himself from his fellow sinners, saying, "I am not like the rest of humanity: greedy, dishonest, adulterous" (Lk. 18:11-12). While the tax collector, who is labeled as having no moral integrity because of his work, bowed down and beat his breast, praying, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Lk 18:13). His prayer has nothing to prove before God except his dire need for mercy. God approves his prayer, and he goes home justified.

What does this parable remind us of?

First of all, we are taught that the virtue of humility is an essential foundation of prayer. We approach God with a pure and contrite heart, knowing that everything is grace, without which we cease to be. Jesus says that "the one who humbles himself will be exalted." The first reading affirms that "the prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal" (Sir 35:17). In the second reading, St. Paul's words to Timothy express his humbleness as a servant. He compares himself to a drink poured out as an offering, considers his sacrifices for the gospel as a love offering, and even sees his death as his final offering to God. He hoped God would accept his humble offering of self.

Second, we recognize our wounded nature and our sinfulness. Our Lord Jesus makes the disposition of the tax collector a model for all. Like the tax collector in the parable, we entrust ourselves to the unfathomable mercy of God. His mercy is greater than any sin we might have committed. Hence, we enter this sacred liturgy through the door of mercy, acknowledging our unworthiness. One of the short yet touching moments of our frailty is when we briefly pray before receiving the Holy Communion: "Lord, I am not worthy that you enter into my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed." And God says the word, and that word heals us and makes us worthy. When God hears, God acts.

And finally, we are reminded not to look down on others and refrain from the arrogance of the Pharisees in dealing with our fellow worshippers. We are in union with one another, offering the Holy Mass through Jesus as one people of God, equally seeking his mercy. We thank God for his mercy! Our encounter with the Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist changes us. He promises us, saying, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will, and forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51).

The Holy Eucharist we celebrate and offer aims to heal and sanctify us when it is received by faith. We should be worrying if there is no transformation happening in our midst.

We are not merely recipients of mercy, nor its keepers like collectible items. We are meant to be channels of mercy.

A week from now, we will celebrate the feast of All Saints Day. This feast reminds us of our call to holiness. The Church teaches that all the baptized are called to a life of holiness (LG, #39). Sainthood is not only for a chosen few but for all of us who believe in Christ. The saints are people who give their best to follow the teachings and life of Jesus Christ, particularly his life of loving service, especially for those who are crying for help, the poor, and in need. A saying goes, "Saints are sinners who keep trying to do good." Like any ordinary people who genuinely live the Catholic Faith, they never stop trying to follow the will of God in their lives.

Let us not forget that God has given us the internal capacity to live a holy life through the gift of the Sacrament of Baptism and nourished through our communion with the Body of Christ. Our challenge is to eliminate self-importance, surrender our pride to God, refrain from putting undue burdens on others, and make an everyday decision to live out the gift of holiness with joy and gratitude. Then and only then, like the tax collector, we will go home justified, made righteous in the sight of God.

God bless you!

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor