

- So what is wrong with this Pharisee's prayer today in St. Luke's Gospel? He is a *good man* who does more than his faith *requires* of him. This Pharisee recognizes the *evils of the world* that surround him, *and he gives thanks for not being part of it.* Thanking God he is not *like* the rest of *humanity* that is *greedy, dishonest, and adulterous*; letting God know he is not like other sinful people like the sinful tax-collector... So what is wrong with that?
- The question becomes *then* what is *true prayer*? Jesus addressed this

parable to “*those who were convinced of their own righteousness*”. Righteousness does not come from what we have accomplished with our work, fasting and tithing that the Pharisee is *proclaiming*.

- In St. Paul’s letter to Timothy, St. Paul credits his *righteousness* not from any *work* he can take credit for; but in his *faith* in Jesus Christ. Righteousness comes from God and God alone. This is what St. Paul points us to in his letter to Timothy.
- In this parable from St. Luke’s Gospel Jesus was telling his followers and us

to enter into prayer with our *heart*, not with a laundry list of our *good deeds or in comparison* to others.

- The Pharisee's religious *dutiful* act of prayer, *failed to pray to God*, his prayer is an act of *self-righteousness*.
- The Pharisee was not really *praying*, he is *informing God* how *good he is!* Yes, he went to the Temple, but he is not there praying with his community. He is by himself praying prayers in the first person singular. His prayers are full of "I's" ---I am not----I fast----I pay tithes---. This type of prayer is not seeking God's *help* for his Jewish brothers and

sisters of his community, or thanks for all he has been given, or for others in need, or his own sin! He is praying a *detached prayer* excluding *anyone or anything* other than his *own self*. This separates himself *spiritually* from the needy, the sick, the outcast and the sinner.

- The Pharisee's prayer is not a *lamenting* of his desire to parallel his life with God's ways and thoughts asking for God's help, forgiveness, mercy and love.
- It leaves us with a *feeling* that we don't need God at all to be an *outstanding and recognized* religious

person. The first reading from Sirach describes God as partial to the weak, listening to the cry of the oppressed, especially the orphans and widows. God always listens to the poor because their prayers come from the heart. God also shows favor on those who do not boast of their merits and to those who have only poverty and mercy to rely on.

- So all of this takes us back to the question what is *true prayer*?  
*“Example of pointing to yourself”*
- There are different ways and types of prayer and *no prayer is wrong*; IF we do it from the *heart*. The Church

teaches there are ways to pray one is contemplative and the other is meditation.

- St. Teresa of Jesus answers what *contemplative prayer* is this way; “*Contemplative prayer in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.*”
- Contemplative prayer is a seeking of the one who loves us, seeking God because we desire to be with him. In this *inner prayer* we can still *meditate*, but our attention is fixed on the *Lord himself*.

- The other way to pray is *meditation*. *Meditation* is above all, a quest. The mind is seeking to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking of us. This type of prayer is difficult to sustain. This *way of prayer* often requires *sacred scripture* particularly the Gospels, maybe an icon, or rosary...
- Meditating on *what we read* helps us to make it our own by *confronting* what it says to us. The scriptures become a book of *life* that takes our thoughts to the *reality of life*, to the extent that *we become humble and*

*faithful. Meditation* will bring us to the question, “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

- These *prompted conversations* found in *meditation* of the heart strengthen our will to follow Christ. This form of prayer is usually done in *lectio divina* or with the rosary meditating on the life of Christ. *Lectio divina* is reading scripture then entering ourselves into the story seeking what God is saying to us. The rosary takes us into *meditation* of the life of Jesus Christ.
- There are *various forms* of prayer. We pray in adoration, petition,

thanksgiving, for blessing, for family, for friends, for good health, or to simply praise God who has given us all that is good.

- The Mass that we are celebrating today *is a prayer*. It contains many of these different *forms* of prayer. These *various prayers* of the Mass *take us* into the great mystery of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist through the words of Holy Scripture and in the prayer that Jesus taught us, the Our Father.
- Prayer is the way to our Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit through heartfelt *conversation*. It is

the way we communicate with God as community and individually. It is an expression of our faith, it gives us grace and it gives us hope in this world and in the world to come.

- Today's parable from Jesus tells us three certain things. *First*, no one who is proud can *truly pray* from the *heart*. It is said the Gates of Heaven are *so low* that *no one* can enter it *even on their knees*. We must have a *humble heart* when we pray to God.
- *Second*, no one whose prayer *despises others* will be heard. We must remember we are all *sinner*s

and we *cannot* make comparisons in *situations* or to *others*.

- Third, *true prayer* requires us to examine our *conscience* to align ourselves with *God's thoughts*.

Prayer is an examination of our own *conscience*. In prayer we *are lead* to examine our own *conscience* aligning our thoughts, beliefs, and life with God. Mark Twain said this about the conscience; "*A clear conscience can be the sign of a bad memory.*" So Prayer too then, also helps us with our *memory*.

- Our prayer must be *centered* in the *life and teachings* of Jesus Christ;

where we find *forgiveness, mercy and love..*

- *True prayer is always offered to God, and to God alone. All this, depends on what we *compare* ourselves with; and when we set our life *beside* the life of Jesus and *beside* the holiness of God, that all that is left to say is, ‘*God be merciful to me-the sinner*’.*
- *May God continue his good work in each one of us with and in our hearts of true prayer.*