HOM 30th Sunday 2025 C October 26

In today's Gospel parable, the tax collector went to the Temple and made an act of contrition: *"O God, be merciful to me, a sinner."* He went home, justified, which means "in God's grace." This connects to our first reading from the Old Testament Book of Sirach – one of the seven books of Wisdom literature – where it says: *"The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds, it does not rest until it reaches its goal…"* Thus it was with the tax collector's humble prayer. It pierced the clouds and touched the heart of God.

This is why, when we come to Mass -- immediately after the greeting -- we begin with a penitential act, the "I confess" or the "Lord have mercy". Otherwise, we would be like the self-righteous Pharisee in the parable who went to the Temple to pray, but went home unjustified because, even though he was keeping the Law and crediting God for this, he failed to recognize his shortcoming of not praying for the tax collector. Instead, he held him in contempt.

Bishop Robert Barron has another great homily for today, based on the Gospel parable. I could never do it justice by trying to paraphrase it, so I hope you will take time to watch it or listen to it online. But let me say this much about it. Bishop Barron explains the difference between living to fulfill God's plan – God's will -- and expecting God to fulfill our will – expecting God to help us get what we want.

These days especially, many, if not most, people who go to church seem to do the latter. They – we – want God to affirm and support and attain what we seek in worldly desires for ourselves – even things that look religious (kind of like the Pharisee in the Gospel). And if we do this, Barron says, we will be quick to condemn people who do not look as religious as we look.

And by the way, Bishop Barron points out how "sometimes the people that look the most religious actually aren't very religious, and the people that look a million miles from God are actually in the right spiritual space…like the tax collector in the Gospel. And if we are in the first category, it's good if have a spiritual enlightenment about this – or that we get called out about it.

Just this past week, for example, a non-church going, non-Catholic, largely anti-religious woman was telling me -- without my asking (which happens a lot because I wear my collar almost all the time, even when I'm grocery shopping) -- about an anonymous church-going Catholic person she knows who has extravagant plans for worldly comforts and pleasures even though this person is up in age. *So, I said something like: "I hope that person does not think he or she is going to live forever? Doesn't that person know that if we do not live for Heaven, we won't live rightly here and now and will not make it to Heaven?"* This seemed to get a thoughtful unspoken response from the woman – or maybe there was a grunt -- that will hopefully help her turn to the Lord and live for Heaven and maybe even help her to help the church-going Catholic to live for Heaven instead of living for what will pass away.

I like today's second reading most of all, however, because it cuts right to the heart of the matter, and also, because I, too, see that the end of the race is close for me. The finish line is in sight, and I want to make it to Heaven, even by-passing Purgatory on the way if I can. That's why, with all my many shortcomings, with every confession I pray not only to overcome my sinfulness – whatever is displeasing to the Lord – but also to atone for all the sins of my life. This requires living completely for God and His will – His plan. Quite a challenge.

In any case, we all do well to live for Heaven, whatever our age. I recall the Reverend Billy Graham giving a talk about the devil's most effective ploy, which he said, was to convince people that they have plenty of time, that it was not urgent to live for Christ. But then before you know it, it's too late to dispose one's heart to wanting to please the Lord ahead of pleasing oneself.

That surely was not how St. Paul lived his life. After his conversion, and the Gospel he received directly from the Lord through infused knowledge, and the extraordinary revelation of Heaven he was given, he strived to live 100% for oneness with Jesus Christ, 100% of the time. And so, when his physical strength was diminishing – his eyesight beginning to fail perhaps -- having been poured out like a libation in the service of God's kingdom – with his martyrdom approaching, he was confident of the outcome – a crown of righteousness from the Lord for himself and also for all those whom he helped to live for Christ.

Brothers and sisters, there's no practical responsibilities – no matter what one's state in life or job -- that are incompatible with living 100% for oneness with Jesus Christ, 100% of time, starting right now. All the saints, but in a special way perhaps, St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and St. Josemaria Escriva (1902-1975) and St. Pierre Gorgio Frassati (1901-1925) and St. Carlo Acutis (1991-2006) taught us this. Also, the many married saints – St. Monica (322-387), King St. Louis IX of France (ten children 1226-1270), St. Elizabeth of Portugal (1271-1336), St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231), St. Hedwig (1174-1243), St. Bridget of Sweden (eight children 1303-1373), and more recently Saints Louis (1823-1894) and Zélie Martin (1831-1877), the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and Dr. Gianna Molla (1922-1962) who died rather than jeopardize the life of her unborn baby.

The Second Vatican Council emphasized that everyone is called to holiness, and that holiness has a thousand faces but is always in some way oneness with Jesus and conformity to Him in doing the Father's will unto the Cross of obedience and love for the life of the world, the salvation of all the willing.

Maybe it would be good if we all had a pre-trial before our particular judgment at death, so that we could work on what needs worked on to please the Lord. I can imagine it might go something like this. Jesus is standing in front of a large crowd, looking both merciful and just. Angels are passing out questionnaires – a kind of checklist of sins and good deeds – instructing everyone to fill out the questionnaires by checking YES or NO to each statement as it applies to them, mindful that they are in the presence of Him who is truth itself and cannot be fooled.

The checklist includes the Ten Commandments and what each one requires of us or forbids: I put God's will first ahead of my own. I use God's name only reverently or prayerfully. I pray each day and participate faithfully and fully in Mass each Sunday except when I can't be present for serious reasons. I obey and honor my parents and / or teachers and others with lawful authority.

I neither hate nor harm anyone. I abstain from sexual thoughts, desires, or actions except those blessed within the sacrament of marriage. I do not desire, steal, or damage what belongs to another person. I am truthful. I do not deliberately harm a person's reputation.

The checklist includes the Beatitudes: I embrace a spirit of poverty in service of God's Kingdom. I try to be a peacemaker and not a trouble-maker. I pray to have a pure heart. I mourn my own sins and the sins of others. I stand ready to be ridiculed or persecuted for sake of Christ and the Gospel. And so on.

It includes the Two Great Commandments: I love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength. I love my neighbor as myself. I strive to love all others as Jesus has loved us.

It even includes the politically sensitive issues. I welcome refugees and immigrants and other strangers who come here lawfully and are law-abiding. I am color-blind when seeking the good of others. I do not wish to see the death penalty applied, even though I accept the lawfulness of it. I do not support boys trying to become girls and men trying to become women, and vice versa. I do not accept so-called same sex marriage even though I treat those who engage in this mercifully. I oppose or at least do not promote or support legal abortion which destroys millions and millions of unborn babies created in the image and likeness of God and I do what I can to protect them. I strive to do all I can to help the poor and afflicted.

All of this was just a sampling of what's on the pre-trial questionnaire, so that you get the idea. And at the end of all this is an optional bonus question that reads: *I am truly sorry for my failings and I ask forgiveness and I wish to offer myself to Jesus, and with Him to the Father, unto the Cross of obedience and love so that God may be all in all the willing, and I pledge to live by this, day in and day out, to the end.*

If this last one is sincerely checked, it will cover a multitude of sins, and a ticket at least to Purgatory – here or hereafter – and will be issued, and the person will come to be justified and receive a welcome to Heaven.

Even without the pre-trial opportunity I mentioned, brothers and sisters, we can all check this bonus question by praying these words silently and sincerely with every Holy Communion and striving to live them out in-between: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.