

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 18:9-14; (R1) Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; (R2) 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18.

St. Luke situates the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector right after the story of the widow who, by persistent pleading, got her request from a corrupt judge Luke 18: (1-8). He did this to teach that perseverance in prayer is not enough: attitudes are equally important.

First, one ought to be recollected in prayer. Obviously, the Pharisee was not. His eyes must have been roving around, otherwise he could not have spotted the tax collector standing far from the altar. The tax collector did not dare raise his eyes to heaven.

Secondly, one ought to be humble in prayer. There certainly was much that was admirable about the Pharisee. Like most religious leaders of his day, he had reduced religion to keeping a whole gamut of rules. At considerable sacrifice, he fulfilled them thoroughly. The law said fast once a year; he fasted twice a week. The law instructed the people to give tithes of some of their possessions; he gave tithes of all he possessed. This was good, but it is no good when such weightier matters of the law as charity and mercy are neglected. His deeds inflated him and made him feel superior to others; in fact, he felt so superior that he felt God owed him. So he prayed with his head unbowed. And in his short, two-sentence prayer, he used "I" five times. His prayer was no prayer; it was a brag!

The tax collector, on the other hand, saw himself for what he truly was in the presence of God — a sinner. In the Greek, the article "the" is used with the noun "sinner;" therefore, the tax collector considered himself, not just a sinner, but the sinner, the worst of sinners. And because God loves truth, "the prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds" (R1). Both the Pharisee and the tax collector went up to the temple to pray; one really prayed, the other did not.

Thirdly, one need not speak much in prayer. The tax collector used only eight words; but he spoke sincerely and from the heart.

Perhaps the most important attitude to have in prayer is a charitable and merciful heart. The Pharisee judged his

fellowman; he spurned him as the stranger cur crossing his threshold. He did not pray for the tax collector, nor try to teach him. He condemned him and exalted himself.

There were two brothers, Bob and Jamie. They had quarreled. Mother sent Jamie upstairs to think over his sins and repent, because he was mostly to blame. When his mother called him down, she asked what he had been doing. He answered, "Praying."

"Well, what did you pray for?" she asked.

"I prayed that God would pardon Bob and make him a good boy, and bless all my deeds."

On the feast of Yom Kippur, a rabbi and cantor stood in front of the synagogue and prayed. The rabbi said, "Lord, I am nothing." The cantor prayed, "Lord, I am nothing." In the back of the synagogue, the janitor also prayed, "Lord, I am nothing." The rabbi poked the cantor and said, pointing back to the janitor, "Look who thinks he's nothing."

Fulton Oursler who wrote *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, related this boyhood experience. His mother had dressed him in his Sunday best and warned him not to leave the front steps. "We'll be walking over to see your aunt," she promised.

He waited obediently on the steps until the baker's son came by and called him a sissy. Fulton sprang from the steps and hit the baker's son on the ear. The baker's son pushed him into a mud puddle. Hopelessly, Fulton began to cry.

Then the ice cream man came by, and young Fulton, forgetting his disobedience, rushed into the house and asked his mother for a penny to buy ice cream. He said he could never forget his mother's answer, "Look at yourself! You're in no condition to ask for anything."

Oursler said that many a year passed after that incident before it dawned on him that "often when we ask help from God, we need to look at ourselves; we may be in no condition to ask God for anything."

*He prayeth best who loveth best
all things both great and small.
S.T. Coleridge*

Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



Washington visit

Sgt. Charles Farrell of Providence, R.I., was in the Air Corps, in communications, when I was assigned in 1944 as chaplain to the 409th Bombardment Group and its auxiliary 416 Support Group in France. He was a remarkably pensive, tranquil and quietly devout young man in his early twenties. He frequently came to the chapel and the chaplain's office to assist me in many things: serving Mass, setting up for services, working with our men. He was a leavening influence with our soldiers. His goodness and friendship were a daily consolation to me.

When young Charlie returned to the States after the European war was ended in 1945, he went to Providence College in Rhode Island, and after being graduated, entered the Dominican Order. He had a brother, a Dominican priest who was a Navy chaplain, and a sister who was a Dominican nun, being educated in New York.

There is a wise Latin ditty that reads:
*Amore, more, ore, re
Servantur amicitiae.*

This translates as: "By love, by habit, by word, by deed, friendships are preserved."

For 40 years, through occasional visits, occasional letters and a phone call on the feast of St. Albert the Great, our friendship has been preserved.

For the past six years Father Farrell, OP, has been the prior of the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. He was finishing his time as the prior on October 18, and going to Dover, Mass. to be on the mission band: for retreats, renewals, spiritual exercises.

So I phoned him. "Father Charlie, I want to visit you before you leave," I said.

Came the cordial answer: "Come. There is a room and a welcome."

Although I spent only two days in Washington, it was an enlightening experience.

Catholic University is directly opposite the Dominican House of Studies

on Michigan Avenue, so besides associating with the Dominicans I also met with several Catholic University people. Considering the constant uproar from the Father Curran rhubarb in Rochester, the bales of letters to the Rochester editors and frenetic meetings by Curranites, I noted with surprise that there was little public excitement about the conflict in Washington.

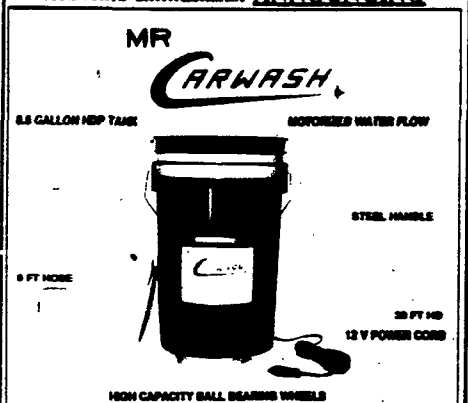
I suppose Father Curran's being a local "Rochester product" makes his contention with the Holy See more of a local interest affair. While everyone says everyone likes Father Curran personally, one person whom I talked with, long associated with the university, said, "He has cost the university millions of dollars by his defiance of the Holy See. Would-be benefactors of the university have withdrawn support. He should have been settled 10 years ago."

It is a pity that the Curran affair has brought such a bad reputation to Catholic University. Frankly I was under the false impression that the whole university was a bastion of heterodoxy. Besides the moral theology section, which is only a small part of the University, there are many fine schools: law, drama, architecture, philosophy and engineering, among others. And what struck me especially is that the school of philosophy has preserved a strong Thomism, adapted to contemporary life.

While the moral theology department — or at least Father Curran — has been a source of concern, the fact is that the whole department is not anti-magisterial by any means. Dr. May, an important faculty member, is quoted as saying that "Father Curran is a kind, sincere man, convinced he is right. But so is President Botha of South Africa."

I know many pastors who are lukewarm about the annual Catholic University collection. I think if they knew the whole story, they would be strong supporters.

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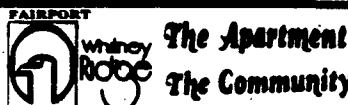
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