

COLUMNISTS

Passing the test of humility

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

Last week we saw that one of the conditions for effective prayer is persistence. This Sunday's readings lay down a second condition, namely, humility. "The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds" (R1). The Gospel confirms this, for the prayer of the humble publican is heard, not that of the self-righteous Pharisee.

Maybe you've heard this story. One night a Hindu priest, a Jewish rabbi, and a proud Catholic sought shelter from a terrific thunderstorm in a farmhouse. The farmer told them he had only room enough for two, the other would have to sleep in the barn.

The Hindu priest said, "I'll be the one. Hardship is nothing to me." A few minutes later, he came back to the farmhouse and said, "I'm sorry, there is a cow in the barn. In my religion cows are sacred; I cannot intrude on it."

"Don't worry," said the rabbi. "I'll sleep in the barn." A few moments later, he returned and said, "I can't sleep in the barn, for there is a pig there. In my religion pigs are considered unclean."

"Oh, all right," said the proud Catholic. "I'll go." A few minutes later, the cow and the pig came to the farmhouse. God is not the only one who resists the proud.



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Why is God attracted to the humble? It is because God is truth. He loves honesty and sincerity. The humble person is truthful and honest. He sees himself for what he really is in relation to God, namely dust and ashes, a creature who depends on God for everything that he is and has.

The other side to the character of the humble man is that he is sincere. He not only knows the truth about himself, knows what he is, but what is greater he is willing to admit it. He doesn't try to play God or think he can make it on his own. In a word, he prays, prays, prays! Prayer is one of the tests of true humility.

In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, our Lord wanted to correct the idea that grace is a human achievement. Some people honestly believe they are what they are, because they've

earned it, deserved it. We lead a good life and we think God owes us.

The Pharisee came to the temple to pray. But what was his prayer? It was a proclamation of all he had done. Only once does he mention God. Five times he uses the pronoun, "I." Augustine said he did not go up to pray but to praise himself. He recites his pieties and condemns his neighbor.

The poor tax collector could claim nothing. He had heard the Pharisee denounce him, for in ancient times it was common practice to pray aloud. Hearing himself condemned, the tax collector prayed, "O God, be merciful to me for I am the sinner, the one the Pharisee is talking about."

Our Lord's judgment of the Pharisee is frightening. He said the Pharisee got nothing for all his trouble.

We can get like the Pharisee when we take a horizontal, not a vertical, view of life. The Pharisee looked only at his neighbor. He compared himself with others. The tax collector looked up only to God. He compared himself with God. As God told Catherine of Siena, "I am all that is; you are all that is not." That's the truth, and the person who admits it becomes a prayerful person, whose prayer is powerful with God.

Once a burning candle said to the darkness, "I am better than you are, for I am brighter."

But someone switched on a light, and then the beaming bulb boasted, "I am better than both of you, for I am the brightest of all."

And all night long the lighted bulb gloried in its light - till the sun rose.

With whom do we compare ourselves? To be humble, we must see ourselves in relation to God and to no one else.

One of the tests of true humility is prayer. Do I pray daily? If I do not, I am saying in effect, "I don't need you, God. I can make it on my own." That's what the Pharisee thought.

Daily Readings

Monday, Oct. 31

Rom 8:12-17; Dt 19:10-17

Tuesday, Nov. 1

Rom 8:18-25; 13:18-21

Wednesday, Nov. 2

2 Rv 7:2-4, 9:1-10; Mt 5:1-12

Thursday, Nov. 3

Dn 12:1-3; Rv 7:1-5; 6:7; Mt 25:1-13

Friday, Nov. 4

Rom 8:26-30; 14:1-6

Saturday, Nov. 4

Rom 11:1-2, 11:15, 25-29; Dt 14:1, 7-11

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