

“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Words from our Gospel today from the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

There is a great danger in the spiritual life, which is showcased in the Gospel parable today of the Pharisee and tax collector who went up to the temple to pray. And that danger is the danger of comparing ourselves to others. When we compare ourselves to others, 1 of 2 things happen. Firstly, we may become inflated with pride. When we compare ourselves to others, we can come away looking pretty good. Perhaps, this should give us pause to be truly grateful for the many blessings we have. Indeed, this is how the Pharisees’ prayer started out. But notice how quickly his prayer turned from thankfulness to condescension. If we compare ourselves to the misfortunes of others, we soon get thinking that we are better than everyone else is. If this comparison is what our confidence and pride and dignity becomes built upon, we can arrogantly start putting others down and we begin gossiping about others so as to maintain our own perceived elevated status amongst others. Instead of striving towards the best person I can become, we fall into complacency and we justify our own shortcomings exclaiming: “I don’t have to outrun the bear, I just have to outrun the person next to me.” What does such an attitude really say about our love and outreach to others? Furthermore, our comparisons would relativize our own struggles instead of allowing us to confront them truthfully. When we fail to take care of them and our problems resurface rearing their ugly head as they inevitably do, our lives have nothing to fall back upon, and we are shattered. Comparing ourselves to the misfortunes of others doesn’t do anyone any good.

The other thing that can happen when we compare ourselves to others is that we end up putting ourselves down. This one is a little trickier to see, but it is so very widespread in our culture and society today. We compare ourselves to others, and we see that they are the ones who have it all: health, beauty, and wellbeing, a good family, a nice house, success in their career, esteem in the community, and an honorable reputation for starters. Their story may inspire us to grow ourselves, but more often than not, this comparison leads us away from thankfulness for the good things we do have and makes us jealous of their good fortune. In effect, we

begin putting our own selves down, saying within our hearts, I'll be ok when... fill in the blank. I'll be okay when I have this; I'll be okay when I look like that; I'll be okay when I achieve what they have. This attitude is more prevalent than ever especially in an age of social media and mass communications, when we can readily see all the pictures of other people's wonderful vacations on Facebook as well as their family accomplishments and how the media and the Internet showcases the glorious lifestyles of others and advertisements tell us that we are missing out on life because we don't have such and such a product. We've subtly and unconsciously been putting a condition on our own self-worth, telling ourselves that we aren't any good because the grass is greener on the other side where everybody else seems to live. Well, it's no wonder that we're so freaking depressed. Sociologist Jean Twenge and other psychologists besides have noted a strong correlation between social media use and a feeling of inadequacy, especially among our youth who crave acceptance but feel worthless when their posts on social media don't garner as many 'likes' or 'retweets' or 'views' by comparison. The reality is you're not meant to live the dreams or lives of others but your own. You don't have to say I'll be okay when... the reality is you're okay now.

We don't have to make ourselves out to be something that we're not. We don't have to compare ourselves to others. God knows exactly who we are, and the amazing thing is, the good news is, that God hasn't abandoned us or given up on us, sinners though we may be. In fact, the cross proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners he died for us so that we could be reconciled. The challenge of comparing ourselves is a struggle I have known personally, wanting to feel accepted and loved by others as well as accepting myself for who God made me to be... And I want to tell you that all those cries you make from the depths of your heart, God hears those cries. This is assured in our first reading and responsorial psalm today. God hears those cries and in response says, I love you for who you are. He sees the good that we are, that we're worth dying for. We don't need to compare ourselves to others to make ourselves feel better or justify our own existence like the Pharisee in our Gospel today. If we want to go home justified, validated for who we are, we need to follow the example of the tax collector and look into the mirror with humility and pray the same thing: for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Readings: <http://uscgb.org/bible/readings/102719.cfm>

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 150

Reading 1 [SIR 35:12-14, 16-18](#)

The LORD is a God of justice,
who knows no favorites.
Though not unduly partial toward the weak,
yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.
The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,
nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.
The one who serves God willingly is heard;
his petition reaches the heavens.
The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;
it does not rest till it reaches its goal,
nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds,
judges justly and affirms the right,
and the Lord will not delay.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23](#)

R. (7a) The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

The LORD confronts the evildoers,
to destroy remembrance of them from the earth.
When the just cry out, the Lord hears them,
and from all their distress he rescues them.

R. The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.
The LORD redeems the lives of his servants;
no one incurs guilt who takes refuge in him.

R. The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

Reading 2 [TM 4:6-8, 16-18](#)

Beloved:

I am already being poured out like a libation,
and the time of my departure is at hand.
I have competed well; I have finished the race;
I have kept the faith.
From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me,
which the Lord, the just judge,
will award to me on that day, and not only to me,
but to all who have longed for his appearance.
At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf,
but everyone deserted me.
May it not be held against them!
But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength,

so that through me the proclamation might be completed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.
And I was rescued from the lion's mouth.
The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat
and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom.
To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Alleluia [COR 5:19](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,
and entrusting to us the message of salvation.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [LK 18:9-14](#)

Jesus addressed this parable
to those who were convinced of their own righteousness
and despised everyone else.
"Two people went up to the temple area to pray;
one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.
The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself,
'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity --
greedy, dishonest, adulterous -- or even like this tax collector.
I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'
But the tax collector stood off at a distance
and would not even raise his eyes to heaven
but beat his breast and prayed,
'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'
I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former;
for whoever exalts himself will be humbled,
and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."