

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Mon, 07/08/2013 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

Psalm 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Luke 18:9-14

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

The book of Sirach, also called Ecclesiasticus, was written in about 180 B.C. by Jesus ben Sira, a man of great love for wisdom and learning, who was well-traveled and in later life conducted a school in Jerusalem. The book explains Judaism, and enjoyed popular acceptance, but was never received into the Jewish canon, which was fixed by Pharisaic Jews—at least in part because of its affinities with the writings of the Sadducees. Today's passage concerning prayer immediately follows a reminder that God cannot be bribed. It stresses the justice of God in hearing and answering sincere prayer, but also emphasizes the solicitude of God for the oppressed: the weak and powerless who have no one to take their part. In a male-dominated society such as Israel, widows and orphans were particularly vulnerable, and God is keenly responsive to them. God is judge and advocate for the lowly who cry out for help.

Today's Gospel continues the theme of prayer with the story of the self-righteous Pharisee and, in contrast, the tax collector who addresses God with deep humility. The Pharisee prays "to himself" (a nuance present in the Greek original but not in our English translation)—possibly suggesting that his proud and boastful prayer is a self-motivated discourse not even truly directed to God at all! His virtuous behaviors, which he catalogues in the prayer, go well beyond Jewish law at the time concerning fasting and charitable giving, it is true. Yet they are combined with a kind of petty, mean-spiritedness that even while addressing God seeks self-aggrandizement by denigrating others.

In contrast, the tax collector is aware of his sinfulness and speaks directly to God from his grieving heart. He is not looking over his shoulder comparing himself to his neighbors, but is completely absorbed in pleading with God. He exemplifies a real (not theatrical) humility. Like the oppressed of the first reading and the poor of the psalm, his sincere prayer is heard and he "went home . . . justified"—that is, having won his suit, gotten what he was seeking: God's mercy. Humility before

God in prayer, a theme seen in all of this Sunday's readings, may be the subject of today's catechesis.

Catholic Doctrine

Humility before God in Prayer

The mystery of faith is nurtured in a vibrant personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is called prayer. What is the fundamental stance of the believer who prays?

Prayer raises our mind and heart to God, but not as a self-centered enterprise. In other words, believers pray not out of pride or willfulness but from the depths of a contrite and humble heart. Humility (from the Latin *humus*, or "earth") is the foundation of and basic stance of prayer (CCC 2559). We are fashioned from the clay of earth, gifted, yet limited, mortal and in need of God.

All forms of prayer are founded in humility before the awesome love of God. But it is in meditation and contemplation where the rich strains of our Catholic tradition affirms the absolute necessity of humility.

In meditation, one's attentiveness is focused through scripture texts and images, icons, liturgical texts and prayers, writings of the spiritual fathers, other spiritual works and the great "books" of creation and of history. Focusing one's meditation through these devices, one seeks to open up the book of life and to the extent that one is humble and faithful, discovers the movement and call of God as the heart is stirred (CCC 2706).

In contemplative prayer, one seeks God as one's lover. It is a silent, wordless communion that can only be received (not achieved). It is a gift given by God to the one who prays knowing that everything is provided to us by divine love. This type of praying requires a total and humble surrender to the loving will of God the Father in ever deepening union through the Spirit with the beloved Son, Jesus (CCC 2712).

False humility, that is, putting on a show of humility to please people or manipulate God, should not be confused with genuine humility before God. Likewise, the denial or suppression of true gifts, blessings and God-given goodness is far from the meaning of Christian humility.

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