

Sunday Message

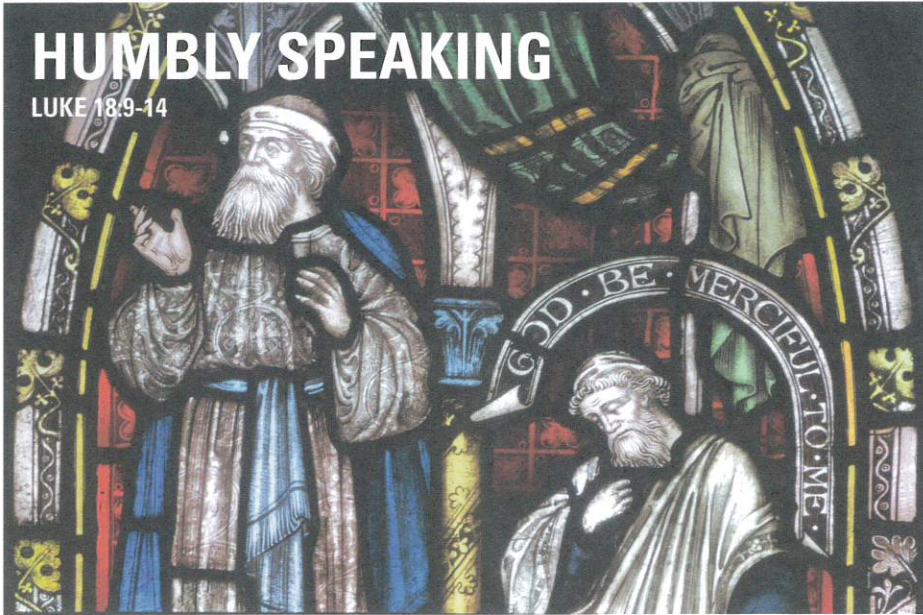
30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year C • 23 October 2022 • Psalter Week 2

HUMBLY SPEAKING

LUKE 18:9-14



You could say that this Gospel is asking a question: who prays best? Is it the professional, who knows all the techniques, or the amateur, who doesn't even trust himself to get it right?

The opening words make it clear that it is addressed to those who pride themselves on being virtuous and look down on everyone else. The characters represent the two extremes of Jewish society in the time of Jesus.

The Pharisee was the totally dedicated religious professional. Strictly speaking, the Pharisees didn't have any place in the religious hierarchy. They were a fellowship of like-minded Jews that included priests and laity but their influence came from the popular esteem they enjoyed. The Pharisee's prayer could be described as a commercial for the movement.

Tax collectors, or publicans, were at the other end of the social scale. They bought the rights to collect the taxes of their own people from the Roman occupying power. If that wasn't bad enough in a strongly nationalist society like Palestine, they made their profit by adding a percentage to the taxes for themselves. Throughout the Gospels, tax collectors are presented as outsiders, who had long ago abandoned any loyalty to their own, so that "tax collector" and "sinner" effectively means the same thing.

One might imagine Jesus' audience waiting in expectation to hear what such a person would pray for. The surprise is that, quite unconsciously, it is this person rather than the religious one who knows instinctively how to pray. He is not there to overwhelm God with a catalogue of his good deeds. Even his demeanour speaks of a humble heart: he stands barely inside the area of the Temple reserved for prayer, he keeps his eyes downcast, he strikes his breast as a sign of penitence and pleads for mercy. After his prayer, he returns home "at rights with God".

Why was the prayer of the Pharisee without effect? It was because he made the fatal mistake of comparing himself favourably with others and judging that God would not hear the prayer of the tax collector. In other words, he was playing God. Luke rounds off the parable with yet another reference to one of his favourite themes: "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted". ■

PRAY

Make the publican's prayer your own. Repeat slowly and from the heart: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

DO

The Pharisee looked down on the tax collector. Is there a person or group of people you look down on? What do you need to do about it?

REFLECT

Rabbi Lionel Blue told a humorous modern Jewish story that echoes this parable. Once, on the Day of Atonement, a man was selected to lead in his local synagogue one of the long confessional prayers that is central to that day's worship. He was not known for his piety, and the fact that he was selected didn't impress some of his critics in the congregation. As he chanted the part of the confession where it says that, on account of his sins, he is but dust and ashes, one critic nudged another and said, "Look who thinks he is dust and ashes!"

Consecrated and familiar words of prayer can sometimes lull us into a false sense of security about ourselves. That is precisely what happened to the Pharisee in the parable. He was blinded by such a false sense of his own righteousness that he failed to recognise his need of salvation. There is not a word of repentance in his prayer; it is a litany of self-congratulation from beginning to end.

Coming face to face with our sinful side is never easy. The tax collector knows he can sink no further and that if anyone is to rescue him, it can only be God, and that is what he prays for. As we think over this Gospel again, we might ask whether our prayer is closer to that of the Pharisee or the tax collector. ■

SAY

Lord, I know I am far from perfect. Help me to live in a way that is pleasing to you. Amen.

LEARN

The Christian has the same human weakness and sin as everyone else.

The Christian trusts in God's love and forgiveness and knows that God forgives him or her first.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice;
turn to the Lord and his strength;
constantly seek his face.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
increase our faith, hope and charity,
and make us love what you command,
so that we may merit what you promise.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Ecclesiasticus 35:12-14.
16-19

A reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus.
The Lord is a judge
who is no respecter of personages.
He shows no respect of personages to the
detriment of a poor man,
he listens to the plea of the injured party.
He does not ignore the orphan's supplication,
nor the widow's as she pours out her story.
The man who with his whole heart serves
God will be accepted,
his petitions will carry to the clouds.
The humble man's prayer pierces the clouds,
until it arrives he is inconsolable,
nor will he desist until the Most High takes
notice of him,
acquits the virtuous and delivers judgement.
And the Lord will not be slow,
nor will he be dilatory on their behalf.
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 32

Response:
This poor man called; the Lord heard him.

- I will bless the Lord at all times,
his praise always on my lips;
in the Lord my soul shall make its boast.
The humble shall hear and be glad. (R.)
- The Lord turns his face against the
wicked

to destroy their remembrance from the
earth.
The just call and the Lord hears
and rescues them in all their distress. (R.)

- The Lord is close to the broken-hearted;
those whose spirit is crushed he will
save.
The Lord ransoms the souls of his
servants.
Those who hide in him shall not be
condemned. (R.)

SECOND READING 2 Timothy 4:6-8.
16-18

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to
Timothy.

My life is already being poured away as a
libation, and the time has come for me to
be gone. I have fought the good fight to the
end; I have run the race to the finish; I have
kept the faith; all there is to come now is the
crown of righteousness reserved for me,
which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give
to me on that Day; and not only to me but to
all those who have longed for his Appearing.

The first time I had to present my defence,
there was not a single witness to support
me. Every one of them deserted me – may
they not be held accountable for it. But the
Lord stood by me and gave me power, so
that through me the whole message might
be proclaimed for all the pagans to hear; and
so I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The
Lord will rescue me from all evil attempts
on me, and bring me safely to his heavenly
kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever.
Amen.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Blessed are you, Father,
Lord of heaven and earth,
for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom
to mere children.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Luke 18:9-14

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Luke.

Jesus spoke the following parable to some
people who prided themselves on being
virtuous and despised everyone else. "Two
men went up to the Temple to pray, one
a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The
Pharisee stood there and said this prayer
to himself, 'I thank you, God, that I am not
grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of
mankind, and particularly that I am not like
this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I
pay tithes on all I get.' The tax collector stood
some distance away, not daring even to raise
his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and
said, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' This
man, I tell you, went home again at rights
with God; the other did not. For everyone
who exalts himself will be humbled, but the
man who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,

maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
(all bow during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Look, we pray, O Lord,
on the offerings we make to your majesty,
that whatever is done by us in your service
may be directed above all to your glory.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

We will ring out our joy at your saving help
and exult in the name of our God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

May your Sacraments, O Lord, we pray,
perfect in us what lies within them,
that what we now celebrate in signs
we may one day possess in truth.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

May the Lord support us all the day long,
until the shadows lengthen,
and the evening comes, and the busy world
is hushed, and the fever of life is over,
and our work is done. Then in your mercy,
grant us a safe lodging and a holy rest,
and peace at the last.

St John Henry Newman