

“Gratitude and Humility”

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Spoiler alert! WE know why Jesus tells this parable. St. Luke tips us off. “[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated other with contempt.”

While we know why Jesus tells this parable – those to whom it was initially directed did not. Jesus simply sets before them two men. Both of them have gone up into the temple to pray – suggesting that both are believers who have come to worship the one true God.

One of them gives thanks. The other begs for mercy. Which one does Jesus say goes home justified?

If you didn’t know the end of the parable – you’d be excused for thinking that the one who gives thanks – the Pharisee – went home justified. After all, he’s simply doing what the Lord has instructed His children to do. He could easily point to the Psalms that are loaded with the exhortation to give thanks and praise to the Lord.

Psalm 30:4 – “Sing praises to the Lord, O you His saints, and give thanks to His holy name.”

Psalm 92:1 – “It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High.”

Psalm 97:12 – “Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.”

Psalm 105:1 – “Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples!”

Psalm 107:1 – “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!”

“See folks,” the Pharisee could say, “that’s what I’m doing I’m the true believer and worshiper of God.”

The Pharisee stands there – with the Scriptures backing him up – giving thanks to the Lord. And yet, Jesus says he is not the one who goes home justified – he is not right with God. Why not? You know why not. It's because the Pharisee – like those who trust in themselves for righteousness – is not really thankful to God.

Rather, he is full of Pride. He thinks that he himself is better than that tax collector over there. He boasts about what he has not done, and what he has done. He doesn't extort, he hasn't committed adultery – he fasts (twice a week!) – he gives tithes of all that he gets. He's a model citizen in God's kingdom – a super believer – someone that others should look up to and emulate.

That's what he thinks about himself – and that's just it – all the Pharisee thinks about is himself. In “thanking God” – he is really thankful of all that he is and does – which means, he's not really thanking God at all.

Such Pride – at its core – is really despising God. Not wanting things to be the Lord's way, but wanting things to be your way. Not your will, Lord, but mine be done. It's the sin of Pride that led to the fall of Satan and his demons – and it's the sin of Pride that then led to the fall of Adam and Eve.

In its essence, Pride is a form of self-delusion. It is the refusal to acknowledge the truth of who God is – and the refusal to acknowledge who you really are. Instead, Pride substitutes self-made illusions for what is true.

At its core, Pride is spiritual blindness. For instance, it is very easy to have a life that is full of your job – just trying to get ahead, to make ends meet – and to call that by the prideful name of “a strong work ethic.”

It is very easy to order your life so that everything revolves around family and community – ballgames, social events, family gatherings – and call that by the prideful name of “being family or community oriented.”

It is very easy to get caught up in a full life of work in and for the church – and to call that by the prideful name of “being a committed Christian” or having a “great love for the Lord.”

In the end, the Pride and arrogance and self-importance – the vanity and fussiness and pettiness --- all the trappings of a self-absorbed life --- will be reduced to ashes, consumed by the fire of the Father’s wrath.

In this Lenten Season we have heard the Lord plead with us – “Turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” (Joel 2:12). “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). That was your prayer in the psalm this evening.

Pride is such a deadly sin that the remedy for Pride is also very serious – it’s called Humility. But Humility is not just the opposite of thinking too highly of yourself – and it’s not thinking too lowly of yourself either. That is still Pride – because you are still thinking of yourself. Rather, Humility is simply not thinking of yourself at all.

It is in Jesus Christ that we see what true Humility is – being born of a woman, being put under the law – being scorned, mocked and ridiculed – and then unjustly convicted, unfairly punished, and shamefully put to death.

You have been baptized into the humble suffering and death of your Savior, Jesus Christ. In your baptism – the sin which separates you from God, the sin which separates you from your neighbor – is put to death, and washed away. Because of this, you are a new creation – the old things have passed away, and behold, all things have become new for you.

Now, instead of the Pride that kills – you have been given the virtue of Humility. This gift is given you in Holy Baptism – the Holy Spirit working in you, turning from your sinful Pride to the Lord with a broken and contrite heart – putting away the trappings of a self-absorbed life and living in the freedom of self-sacrifice.

With this gift and the working of the Holy Spirit – you are truly humble, and truly grateful. Truly thankful to the Lord for all His mercies and tender loving-kindness toward you. Rather than looking down on others, on “those people” – in humility, you give thanks to the Lord for all people.

Washed away with the humble gratitude is the boasting in one's self, and one's good works – and the new creation is thankful that the Lord has such good use for them, to do good works in and through them for the sake of others.

For as Jesus tells you tonight – “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Thanks be to God, that He has had mercy on us sinners, humbly repented us – and in Christ, and by His forgiveness, exalted us as His beloved children, to live in His kingdom, now and eternally.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.