

**30<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – C; Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022**  
**Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; 2Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14**

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

It is the basic tendency in us by which we project ourselves to be perfect and right and stamp others be wrong. In other words, we all have the attitude of ‘**I am OK and you are not OK**’. In order to confirm our own good qualities, we dig out the shortcomings of others and exhibit them in public. And also we compare our lives with other people who are less fortunate and we feel proud that I am not like them; I am a good person! In short, knowingly or unknowingly you and I fall into the category of the **self-righteous** people whom Jesus condemns.

In today’s gospel we have an eye opening parable which is unique to Luke. Through the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, who are at two extreme levels in their righteousness and wickedness, Jesus shows us as what should our genuine attitude be when we stand before God to pray. Here, the statement of Jesus, “**But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first**” (Mt 19:30) becomes fully true. For, the Pharisee who was always considered to be the first and highly religious goes out of the Temple to be the last in the eyes of God; whereas, the tax collector a traitor and public sinner goes out to be the first before the eyes of God.

This parable always put many good Christians in confusion and dismay as they fail to understand exactly what went wrong with this holy Pharisee. Let us look at the life of Pharisees. They were the Jewish religious leaders who strictly observed all Mosaic Laws and Precepts. The Pharisee in our story is like one of them. *The shocking part of the story is that, though he was highly religious and idealistic still he was condemned by Jesus.* On the other hand, the tax collector was a crook and cheater in letter and spirit. He collected the tax from his fellow Jews unjustly and after paying a portion of it to the Romans, he kept the big chunk of money. So every tax collector amassed wealth through illegal ways. The tax collector had no justification before God and men; he could not claim to have any single good act. In the modern age, as many Christians think and say, ‘he should not have been in the Temple in the first place.’ But still our Lord comments at the end of the parable, “**I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for whoever exalts himself will be humbled and who humbles himself will be exalted.**” Our Lord summarizes everything in this short saying.

In this parable, The Pharisee was condemned by Jesus for his boasting of his righteousness. He was not humble enough before the Almighty God who alone is

perfect. Here the Pharisee was not even praying to God; rather as Jesus says: “The *Pharisee* took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself. In other words, he was just saying to himself, filled with self-righteousness, pride and condemnation against the tax collector. He neither was praying for any help from God nor admitted his sins; rather he was just informing God of the good life he led. **He never attributed his qualities to the Grace of God either.** He didn’t feel the need of remaining *humble before God*. On the other hand, the tax collector was not even confident to raise his head before the Lord and pray. He neither offered any list of his good acts to God nor the list of his heinous sins of extortion and exploitation. He just stood there and uttered only **a short sentence: “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.”** These words reflected his acknowledgment of sins and repentance. And the God of mercy who reads the hearts of people knew how repentant that tax collector was. Actually his humility before God made him righteous.

St. Paul in his letter to the 2Corinthians, in acknowledging his imperfection before the Almighty God, writes, “**I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me**” (2Cor 12:9b). If the great apostle like St. Paul could say this sincerely, then what claim do we have before the Lord? No doubt, we all have many good qualities on which we should never boast, especially when we stand before the Lord to pray. Whatever we have and what we are, belong to God. We need the humility of St. Paul to acknowledge: **By the Grace of God I am what I am**” (1Cor. 15:10). We may be a lot better than many others. But remember, others have many qualities which we don’t have. So we have no right to condemn someone over his/her acts or life. We should know that before the Almighty God, we are all imperfect beings. So our attitude in prayer should be that of the tax collector who prayed: “**O God, have mercy on me a sinner.**” What God appreciates in us is nothing but our humility and admission of our sinfulness. Let us pray with the Psalmist, **My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn (Ps 50:19).**