

DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR 30th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

The good and the bad go up to the temple to pray, one is a Pharisee who leads a decent, religious life. The other, is a tax collector who is a crook, and up to his neck in corruption. However, only **one** of them **actually** prays.

The Pharisee addresses **his** prayer to **himself**. And the topic of his prayer is his **own** achievements. He fasts twice a week and gives 10% of his earnings to the poor. This is certainly good, because if all Christians gave 10% of their earnings, the world would be a much better place. But, for all his giving, the Pharisee does not **give** the most important thing and that is, **himself**.

The tax collector stands far off in the shadows. He has nothing to boast about. **His** percentage is stolen from his **own** people, including the poor. But he doesn't waffle on like the Pharisee, he doesn't beat about the bush, he beats his breast instead. And **he** throws **himself**, entirely at the mercy of God.

Now Jesus' answer comes as a shock to the whole religious system. Because **he** says, that the tax collector will go home **justified** whereas the Pharisee will **not**. In the judgement of Jesus, everything is turned upside down.

When the Pharisee engages in self-examination, he trusts in himself, and he concludes, that he is overall, acceptable to God. He has an assumed confidence, that God will look favourably on him, because of his pious practices. He sees himself as righteous, and regards others with contempt, especially tax collectors. It is this contempt that angers Jesus most of all.

In **his** self-examination, the tax collector beats his breast, a sign of repentance. He recognises his need of God's mercy and shows sorrow for his sins. He **prays** for **mercy**, and his prayer goes straight up to heaven. Whereas, the Pharisee's prayer goes to its destination, which is, himself.

The tax collector gets much more than he is asking for, for he is **justified** because in God's court of justice, **he** is acquitted. The Pharisee, on the other hand, doesn't **need** the free gift of justification because, **he** is justifying himself. He fails to realise, that self-confident boasting of one's good deeds, will not achieve acquittal in God's court of justice.

Now, the Pharisee's real problem, is that he is not really sure who he actually is. His **real** self is a **secret**, masked by his pious religiosity. Whereas, the tax collector knows **exactly** who **he** is. **His real** self is definitely **no** secret. He **knows** he is a **sinner**, and an outcast in the Jewish society.

The Pharisee, in his self-examination, compares himself with everyone else, when in fact, he should compare himself with the life of Jesus. If he did, he would then realise that, he **too**, is a sinner. The Pharisee has not yet comprehended that both he and the tax collector are sinners, and that they are both **beloved** sinners in God's eyes. In God's eyes, that means in Jesus' eyes, each is loved by God in equal amount. Therefore, in response, each should look upon each other, as equal. For there is no-one, to look down upon, in God's world. But the Pharisee did look down on people. That was his great sin.

Jesus, always had a special place in his heart for the less fortunate. He helped **most** of all, those who needed the **most** help. And, no-one was neglected his world. He set **us** an example to follow, and commanded us to be like him, and love our neighbour.

But, do we treat those **out** of sight, **different** from those we **can** see, thereby, we ignore our neighbours in **other** towns, cities or countries. Or worse still, do we **pretend** we **can't** see those less fortunate, whom we **can** see, and **do** see each day. Or in simple words, do we treat **different** people, **differently**? Do we see some people, **more equal** than others? Jesus never did. Nor should we. Because there should be **no** place for **contempt**, in our lives.

To accept the truth that we are sinners, does not mean we have to go around in sackcloth and ashes. It simply means that we accept that we are human, and we sin.

And at the end of each day, when we self-examine and compare ourselves with the life of Jesus and the holiness of God, then all that is left for us, to say, is, "**God be merciful to me, a sinner.**"

But don't forget, "**the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end: they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**" Lam.3:22-23.