

... “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

..... (Luke 18:13)



Reflection:

We have very often heard or recited the prayer “God, have mercy on me a sinner”. A very simple but powerful prayer, which brings mercy and grace to the penitent. This prayer comes from the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, told by Jesus in the temple. Jesus uses the parable to explain how mercy justifies and restores sinners.

It is to be noted that Jesus addresses this parable to “some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others” (18:9). Not only did they hold themselves up as righteous, but they also despised others, who according to their opinion, did not deserve mercy.

In the parable we see the prayers of the two main characters and Jesus draws attention to their very different attitudes. The Publican did not have the courage to face God, because of his awareness about his own sinfulness. While, the Pharisee, in addition to holding up his righteousness and boasting about his rigorous rituals, compares himself to the Publican and despises him. The Publican simply humbled himself and prayed for mercy, and that is what he received. (18:14a). He was justified by God, because of his humility.

Jesus goes on to say “for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted”. It is quite apparent that the mercy of God is favored upon those who humble themselves before the Lord.

It is pertinent here to reflect on our attitudes. With whom in the parable do we compare ourselves, with the Pharisee or the Publican? Probably we may be quick to argue that we are mostly like the Publican, however in reality most of us are comparable to the Pharisee who prays like the Publican. In our outward behavior and prayers, we may be like the Publican, but in our inward attitudes we are usually Pharisaic. We tend to compare ourselves to people around us and take comfort in the fact that we are better than many others; our sins are not so grave as those of others and that we are better/more regular and rigorous in our sacramental and religious life than them, etc.

It is this attitude which Jesus wants us to be careful about. The mercy of God is instantaneous. A simple but heartfelt prayer that we make to God in humility brings grace and mercy into our lives. The beauty of this verse, commonly known as the Jesus prayer, is that it is totally God focused. The whole attention of the pray-er is on God, the Father, who is full of mercy. The pray-er longs to be clothed with the mercy of the Father. And it can be prayed any time, both when you are mired in the filth of sin or when you are walking steadily. For at any point in our life, we need the mercy of God to draw us closer to Him and to keep us rooted in His love.

As we celebrate the year of mercy, pondering on the great mercy God shows to us, let us be mindful of our attitudes and prayers. God calls each one of us to be merciful just like Him. Let our prayers be sincere conversations with God in humility, mindful of our need for mercy. Let us be merciful to ourselves and to others around us. Even as the Extraordinary Jubilee year of mercy comes to a close on November 20th, our journey of mercy continues, freeing our lives to enjoy the steadfast love of God all the days of our life and be witnesses of that love to all around.

Saint's quote:

God is merciful to those who want to love Him and who have placed their hopes in Him." St. Francis de Sales

Pope's quote:

The tax collector — the other man — presents himself in the Temple with a humble and repentant spirit: "standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast" (v. 13). His prayer was very brief, not long like that of the pharisee: "God, be merciful to me a sinner". Nothing more. A beautiful prayer! Indeed, tax collectors — then called "publicans" — were considered impure, subject to foreign rulers; they were disliked by the people and socially associated with "sinners". The parable teaches us that a man is just or sinful not because of his social class, but because of his way of relating to God and how he relates to his brothers and sisters. Gestures of repentance and the few and brief words of the tax collector bear witness to his awareness of his own miserable condition. His prayer is essential. He acts out of humility, certain only that he is a sinner in need of mercy. If the pharisee asked for nothing because he already had everything, the tax collector can only beg for the mercy of God. And this is beautiful: to beg for the mercy of God! Presenting himself with "empty hands", with a bare heart and acknowledging himself to be a sinner, the tax collector shows us all the condition that is necessary in order to receive the Lord's forgiveness. In the end, he is the one, so despised, who becomes an icon of the true believer.

Jesus concludes the parable with the judgment: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (v. 14). Of these two, who is the corrupt one? The pharisee. The pharisee is the very icon of a corrupt person who pretends to pray, but only manages to strut in front of a mirror. He is corrupt and he is pretending to pray. Thus, in life whoever believes himself to be just and criticises others and despises them, is corrupt and a hypocrite. Pride compromises every good deed, empties prayer, creates distance from God and from others.

Pope Francis, 1st June 2016

Act of mercy: Bearing wrongs patiently, admonish the sinners

When our prayers become selfish like the Pharisee's, God will also answer us with something that would rebuke our selfishness. Spiritual pride is the worst sin that drifts us away from the Mercy of the Father. Reflecting on this parable, let us prayerfully examine whether our spiritual growth has made us pride and to look at others with criticism? Do we often pass judgement on others? Let us prayerfully ask the grace to bear the wrong of others and to bow down before the Lord to be steeped in His mercy. Let us strive to refrain ourselves from judgement, presumptions and condemnation and to accept the good in every person.

Let us pray together 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner'.

Mother Mary, Mother most admirable, pray for us. Hail Mary...