

# Sunday, October 27, 2019

## 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

#### Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

2nd Reading: 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Responsorial: Psalm 34:2-3, 17-19, 23

Gospel: Luke 18:9-14

### Living a Life Grounded on God's Love and Mercy, Not on Judging Others

*I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity. (Luke 18:11)*

Try to picture the scene. First, there is the Pharisee, a respected member of society, taking up “his position” in the Temple (Luke 18:11). He has a special spot where he would pray, just as he has in his synagogue (Matthew 23:6).

Dramatically and carefully, he lifts his hands in prayer. His phylactery—a leather box tied around his head containing Hebrew Scripture passages on parchment—is wider than most and eclipses his eyebrows. The tassels of his prayer shawl—meant to be subtle reminders of the Law of Moses—are longer and more luxurious than most, as much a fashion statement as a sign of devotion (Matthew 23:5). He is a striking figure who looks superior to “the rest of humanity” (Luke 18:11).

Now picture the tax collector. He has no special prayer space. He keeps his head bowed so as to avoid the disdainful gaze of the Pharisee. A well-paid member of the Roman bureaucracy, he is dressed neatly but not pretentiously. His cheeks are stained with tears.

He has come to the Temple for one reason. He has recently realized how corrupt he has become. A little extortion here, a little fuzzy math there, and he has become quite wealthy. But at what cost? He has defrauded people who can barely make ends meet. He has sent men to debtors' prison with no regard for their families. He sees it now, and he is deeply sorry. Words fail. All he can say is, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

The Pharisee, pleased with the perfection of his prayer, leaves just as he came in: convinced of his own righteousness and despising everyone else (Luke 18:9). But the tax collector leaves feeling free. With a lighter step and a brave smile on his face, he heads home. Tomorrow he will apologize to his neighbors and return their money.

We each have a little of the Pharisee and a little of the tax collector in us. Let's lean into the tax collector at Mass today and pray,

*“Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!”*

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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**Questions for Reflection or Discussion:**

1. The first reading begins with these words: *The LORD is a God of justice, who knows no favorites. Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet he hears the cry of the oppressed. The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint. The one who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens.*
  - How would you describe the message the psalmist is trying to convey regarding the attributes of God?
  - Do you consider yourself *one who serves God willingly*? To what extent do you respond just out of duty versus responding out of an experience of God's love and mercy toward you? What is the difference?
  - In what way is the Lord a *God of justice* who hears the cries of the *weak, oppressed, orphan, and widow*.
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: *I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth.* It continues with a message similar to the first reading: *The LORD confronts the evildoers, to destroy remembrance of them from the earth. When the just cry out, the Lord hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves. The LORD redeems the lives of his servants; no one incurs guilt who takes refuge in him.*
  - How would you describe the similarities between the first reading and the responsorial psalm?
  - What can you do to be more faithful to the opening words during your times of prayer -- and throughout the day?
  - Do you know of some people who are going through difficult circumstances right now? What steps can you take individually, or with others, to reach out to them?
3. The second reading begins with these words: *Beloved: I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance.* It ends with these words: *At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever.*
  - What message do you think Paul was trying to convey with the beginning words of the reading?
  - When you look at your life, how important is it to have *competed well* and *finished the race* God has given you? Why? What are some steps God may want you to take to be even more faithful to his call for your life?
  - What message do you think Paul was trying to convey with the ending words of the reading?
  - Do you believe that as you go through difficult times the Lord will rescue you, as well, *from every evil threat* and will bring you *safe to his heavenly kingdom*?
4. The Gospel begins with these words: *Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else.* In the parable, the Pharisee's prayer was full of pride. The tax collector's prayer was full of humility *as he beat his breast and prayed, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."* The reading ends with these words: *I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*
  - What was it about the Pharisee's prayer that kept him from being *justified*? What was it about the tax collector's prayer that allowed him to go *home justified*?
  - How can you incorporate into your own prayers some of the specific qualities of humility that are in the short, but powerful, prayer of the tax collector?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading and ends with these words: "The Pharisee, pleased with the perfection of his prayer, leaves just as he came in: convinced of his own righteousness and despising everyone else (Luke 18:9). But the tax collector leaves feeling free. With a lighter step and a brave smile on his face, he heads home. Tomorrow he will apologize to his neighbors and return their money. We each have a little of the Pharisee and a little of the tax collector in us. Let's lean into the tax collector at Mass today and pray, *Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!*"
  - How would you describe the message conveyed by these words from the meditation?
  - How can you put into practice the last two sentences? "We each have a little of the Pharisee and a little of the tax collector in us. Let's lean into the tax collector at Mass today and pray, *Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!*"

**Take some time now to pray for the Lord's continued mercy and forgiveness, and ask him for the grace to say yes to his call to be like him. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.**

***"Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!"***

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization ([www.christlife.org](http://www.christlife.org)), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal ([www.nsc-chariscenter.org](http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org)), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry.]