30 C

MDP of God

My friends, in our gospel today we heard of quite a contrast between the Pharisee who was convinced of his own self-righteousness and the tax collector who was well aware that he was a sinner

 This *was a Pharisee who was very impressed with Himself*

 After all he fasted twice a week-- he paid tithes on his whole income.’

He was certainly convinced that he was much better than most of the rest of humanity- he wasn’t greedy, dishonest or adulterous

He was especially convinced that he was much better than the tax collector who was there

Jesus tells us the tax collector didn’t even dare to raise his eyes to heaven – he beat his breast and said, “Lord, be merciful to me a sinner”

 Jesus tells us that he went home justified while the Pharisee didn’t

And my friends, *I think this is a reading that I as a priest- and all of you as regular church goers really need to reflect on*

Because the fact is that right now we are following God’s commands to give Him worship – because we come to His house on His day- around His altar – *we can begin to think that we’re better than others*

And that because we’re so good *we deserve God’s blessing* – we deserve the promise of heaven – we’ve earned our way into eternal glory

And the fact of the matter is that God owes us nothing- we don’t earn our way into heaven-/// we don’t earn our way into God’s family – we don’t deserve to be with God forever---- *that all comes by God’s gift*

On our own we fall short

Our response to God’s blessings – the blessings of faith – the blessing of the Holy Eucharist that we are so privileged to have [think of it—in a few minutes time we’re going to receive the very Body and Blood of the Savior--- the blessing of practicing our faith--- our response to God should be one *of profound gratitude- of humble gratitude*

The Pharisee isn’t condemned by Jesus because he thanked God for his blessings *– he was condemned because he failed to recognize his blessings as God’s gifts*--- **and because he looked at others with contempt**

*He was bragging to God*- He was basically saying to God- “God you are so lucky that I’m on your side- because ***God I’m just so good***”

“Look what I do God – most people aren’t nearly as good as me, God—God you should be so grateful to have someone as wonderful as me on your side.”

 **No!!!!!!!!!- that’s not how it works folks**

He’s the one who should have come with a sense of humility that God has given him the grace to accomplish what he’s accomplished [after all—when we want to do good it’s because God gave us the grace to want to do good—when we accomplish good—it’s because God gave us the grace to accomplish good]--– **He shouldn’t be bragging to God** – he should be humbled by God’s gifts to him--- but he wasn’t humble

**And even worse** *he was filled with contempt for others*

When we see people doing what they shouldn’t be doing—our first response shouldn’t be one of hatred or contempt—our first response should be, “*But for the grace of God, there go I”*

I know whenever I visit people in jail or prison – often they are good people who’ve made some mistakes- good people who’ve made bad choices- how blest I am that God in His mercy saved me from that

My thoughts are in those situations --God if it wasn’t for your grace- I’d be lost—I’d be even a worse sinner then I already am – I would have no hope

And then our response toward others should be a response of compassion – *to want to help others come to God’s grace*

 **That’s not what the Pharisee did**

When sinners came to Jesus – the Pharisees didn’t say, “Isn’t this great- wow, even big time sinners are repenting- even sinners are coming back to God—isn’t this wonderful”

No – when the sinful woman washed Jesus feet with her tears and dried them with her hair – the Pharisee who was hosting Jesus didn’t say, “*Isn’t it wonderful that people are coming back to God*--- **No!!!! –** He said, probably with contempt, “if this man were a prophet**, he would know what kind of woman she is – that she’s a sinner**” [Can you just feel the love?]

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At one point in Luke’s gospel when the Pharisees are complaining that sinners are coming to Him, Jesus tells three parables

He tells the parable of the lost sheep – the parable of the lost coin- and the parable of the lost son [or the prodigal son]

*And basically all of those parables are to get the Pharisees to see how they’re acting*

He says if you lost a sheep--- you’d rejoice when it was found---- if you lost a coin, you’d rejoice when it was found--- but with the prodigal son – *he was lost* **– he was dead to his father**—but he came back--- and in that parable the main character is really the older brother who won’t celebrate that his brother has returned

He was like the Pharisees- Jesus is saying “these brothers and sisters of yours have been lost – rejoice that they’re coming back to God – rejoice that they’ve repented – rejoice that the Father is welcoming them home”

But the Pharisees wouldn’t rejoice – *because they didn’t love their neighbors* – **they held them in contempt**

In fact they were angry at the thought that God would dare to forgive them- they felt they themselves had been so good – how good God possibly forgive someone who fell short of their standards?

They thought they were righteous by their own deeds and held everybody else who they judged to be sinners in disdain

When in fact, because of their failure to love – *they were among the worst sinners in the eyes of God*- they failed to recognize how much they themselves needed the mercy of God

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And don’t get me wrong, Jesus isn’t saying that it doesn’t matter if we obey His commandments—He’s not saying that giving Him worship or obeying the other commandments or paying our tithe is a matter of indifference to Him

But He is saying that we need to approach Him with a sense of humility and gratitude

We are here by God’s grace [in God’s house right now] *We’ll soon be receiving Jesus Himself* –and it’s so important that we invite others to God’s grace

If we’re faithful to God’s commands – *we should be so grateful to Him that He gave us the grace to be faithful* – and we should in love reach out to others who don’t know His commands- or who are indifferent to God – and we should invite them to faith

 *Invite them with love* – **not disdain**

 Invite them with love – *not hold them in contempt*

Because my friends—without God’s grace we’d be in the same boat

With Jesus- with His saving grace – because of His saving work we have the hope of salvation

*Those blessings should fill us with a profound gratitude* [not arrogance]- and with hearts full of gratitude- *with humble hearts filled with love for our brothers and sisters who don’t know the Lord* – we should invite others to come to a saving faith

So I want to ask all of you to think about this—When was the last time that you personally shared your faith with someone who doesn’t know God?

When was the last time you told someone without faith what a great gift the Holy Eucharist is to you and invite them to come to our faith?

My friends, let’s be grateful for the gift of our faith – *not arrogant*, **but grateful**

And let’s love others enough – to invite them to the faith- that faith that saves us – the faith that gives us hope – the faith that unites us to Jesus who is the source of our eternal life