

Homily: 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday: Cycle C: 2016: Sir 35: 12-14, 16-18; Ps. 34; 2 Tim 4: 6-8, 16-18;  
Lk 18: 9-14

“Relying on the Lord in humility of heart”

Humility is a key for growth in holiness: for without the honest acknowledgement of our struggle with pride, sinfulness of various sorts, and our need for God, we are not going to make much progress in the Christian life. That is also why the regular reception of the Sacrament of Confession is so important - if we want to grow spiritually, because by going to the Confessional we are saying like the tax collector in the Gospel today: “*God be merciful to me a sinner.*” Besides these realities, what is Jesus specifically trying to teach us today by this story of the Pharisee and the tax collector?

1. **Humility is the absolute necessary foundation for an authentic relationship with the Lord.** The reality is we often have to be “knocked off our high horse”, by some big event, in order to really grow in humility, e.g., see the life St. Paul, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Augustine, St. Ignatius of Loyola, etc. It often doesn’t happen in the course of daily routine, although it can, if we open our hearts to the grace. Bringing it closer to home I think of my own life: it was only after I went through some great suffering as a teenager in relation to my family and my friends that I woke up spiritually: *I realized the needed to make an honest confession of my sins in the Sacrament of Confession and to turn my life over to God in a more radical way and to strive to live the Catholic faith with integrity, which I had not done up to that point in my life - but I did as most worldly people do: make up my own rules of how I was going to live and not have God and the Church tell me what to do.* Hopefully I am still making progress in this regard, but looking back over my own life and the many lives I have dealt with as a priest, it is almost always through the mystery of the Cross and suffering that most people learn humility, if they ever do. And tied into this reality is seeing the need to turn over our life to the Lord and His loving care, and daily striving, humbly with God’s help, to be obedient sons and daughters of the Catholic Faith which Jesus Himself founded and promised to be with until the end of time through the ministry of St. Peter and his successors as Pope (see: Matt 16: 13-20). No other Church can make that claim. What a gift it is to be Catholic and what a responsibility as well!

2. **Our religious observance must be a reflection of our interior disposition of humility and love for the Lord.** We see Jesus today comparing the Pharisee and the Tax Collector's religious dispositions. I don't think Jesus is saying that is not important what we do in our lives or how we live. In and off itself it is not good to skip out on Mass, or to be greedy or dishonest, or adulterous, or to take advantage of people like the ancient tax collectors did. But what the Lord is clearly saying is it doesn't matter how "good" a life you lead on the surface for all to see, if inside you are full of pride and self-righteousness as opposed to love and humility. Jesus didn't say in the Gospel today that the tax collector was leading a great life, but at least he acknowledged his sinfulness and need to turn to God and hopefully change. The Pharisee on the other hand thought he was "all set" because he was "doing all the right things externally," and tragically became spiritually proud and full of himself because of it; and almost it seems wanted God to give him a little pat on the back for being so "good." What a frightening spiritual dynamic!
3. **We also can fall into this spiritual trap if we are not careful.** That is why it is so important each day to say in prayer, "*Lord Jesus, be merciful to me a sinner.*" This little prayer, from the tax collector, became what is known at the "Jesus prayer" in the Christian Spiritual Tradition and by saying it throughout the day many people down through the ages have both called to mind the presence of God and grown in holiness by relying on Jesus for all things in ever greater humility of heart. The Divine Mercy devotion's key phrase, *Jesus I trust in You* is similar in its effectiveness. **St. John the Baptist** had that same interior disposition of love and humility when he said about Jesus, "*He must increase and I must decrease*" (John chapter 3: 30). Yes, the Lord is so good to us: *He gives us the Sacramental life of the Church, daily graces, the moral teaching of the 10 Commandments and of the Catholic Church which has the wisdom of 2000 years of reflection upon the human condition guided by the Holy Spirit, a gift of ever deeper prayer if we open our hearts to Him in humility and love, and finally the mystery of the Cross to help us grow.* By God's grace may we make some progress each day in the ways of humility, to shine as witnesses of His love and truth to others. God bless you.