



Deacon Steve's Reflections on the Sunday Readings
October 27, 2019 – 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sirach 35: 12-14, 16-18 Psalm 34: 2-3, 17-19, 23 2
Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18
Luke 18: 9-14

"O God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

These words, taken from today's reading from the Gospel of Saint Luke, are often referred to as the *Jesus Prayer*. Although brief, the words remind us of the proper attitude that we are called to take in our relationship with God. God is the Creator of all good things. As His creatures, we are called to give praise and thanksgiving for all He has given us. A proper relationship with the Lord is required at all times, the foundation of our lives if we are to be Disciples of Christ and live according to the Great Commandment of loving God, and loving neighbor.

At the beginning of the Sacred Liturgy, the priest, acting in the person of Christ, says, *"Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries."* In doing so, we echo the prayer of the tax collector, who does not exalt himself as did the Pharisee, but rather prayed with a profound depth of humility. Following our cry for mercy to our Lord and Savior, the celebrant further leads us in prayer: *"May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life."* Only when orienting our hearts and minds to God in a spirit of repentance and reconciliation, can we then enter into the celebration of the Word and the Eucharist.

In today's reading from the Gospel of Saint Luke, Jesus addressed the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to illustrate the proper approach in prayer. True prayer, genuine and authentic prayer, demands a humble disposition to God. It is not a time for self-exaltation, which keeps us from God, but rather a time for humility, which allows one to empty one's self and allows God to penetrate our very being. The Pharisee's prayer is more like a litany of praise for himself. He uses his prayer as an opportunity to favorably compare himself against others – judging his worth according to his own designs. Through his self-absorbed attitude, he erects a barrier against God's gift of grace. Conversely, the tax collector's prayer is a plea to God for mercy, a prayer of humility that opens his soul to the gift of God's grace. Jesus concludes: *"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."*

When we pray, let us avoid the temptation to attempt to impress God. After all, He knows what we have done. Instead, let us use prayer as a time not only to speak, but to listen, so that God's grace enters into our heart, mind and spirit. This is an opportunity for us to draw nearer to the LORD and to embrace the love that He unconditionally offers us, so that we might become His earnest and devout disciples. As we heard in the Responsorial Psalm: *"I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth. Let my soul glory in the LORD; the lowly will hear me and be glad."*

Deacon Steve Szmuto