

***O God, be merciful to me, a sinner***  
***(Lectio Divina for Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time - C)***

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**Opening Prayer:** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, how we thank You for the wonderful example of true humility that is seen in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who despite being God incarnate, lived His life in humble submission to You, learning to be both submissive and obedient by the things that He suffered. Thank You, Lord, that in union with Christ we have the mind of Christ, as we also submit to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Help us to develop the beautiful spiritual fruit of humility that is so important in the lives of all Your children, if we are to grow in grace and to mature into a deeper knowledge of our Lord Jesus. Help us not to do anything out of selfish ambition or vanity, but rather may we develop the godly grace to regard the needs and desires of others as being more important than our own. Teach us to live as Christ lived, in the power of the Spirit and to Your praise and glory. In Jesus' name we pray- Amen.

**A reading from the book of Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18:** 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. The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal, nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, judges justly and affirms the right, and the Lord will not delay. **(The word of the Lord / Thanks be to God)**

**Commentary:** Sirach declares “the prayer of the lowly, pierces the clouds to reach the unseen throne of God.” Such prayers are heard because they come from the hearts of people who know how much they need God. Although God has no favorites and answers the prayers of all, the oppressed, the orphans, the widows, and those who can least help themselves are His special concern and their prayers are heard by God whose love is universal as He is the Father of all and at the same time His love is partial as He gives preferential option for the poor and lowly.

**Responsorial Psalm (Ps 34). *The Lord hears the cry of the poor.***

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.

**R. *The Lord hears the cry of the poor.***

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.

**R. *The Lord hears the cry of the poor.***

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.

**R. *The Lord hears the cry of the poor.***

**A reading from the second letter of St. Paul to Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18:** 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. 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. Amen. (**The word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God**)

**Commentary:** The words of St. Paul are his last will to his spiritual son, Timothy. Paul sees his imminent martyrdom and expresses thus, "I am already being poured out like a libation." Further he thanks God for vindicating him in his first trial before the Roman magistrate, giving him a chance to bear witness to the Gospel before the pagans. But, though rescued once from the lion's mouth, Paul is realistic in predicting that he is bound for the Lord's Heavenly Kingdom, finishing his life's race as a humble "apostle to the Gentiles." He writes, "I have finished the race; I have kept the Faith. From now on, the crown of righteousness awaits me." While reporting his accomplishments, he humbly acknowledges like the publican the source of strength for the success of his apostolate: "The Lord stood by me and gave me strength."

**A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 18:9-14** Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. "Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity --greedy, dishonest, adulterous -- or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.' But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.' 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." (**The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ / Praise to you Lord Christ**)

**Meditation:** The devout Jews observed three prayer-times daily, at 9 AM, 12 noon and 3 PM. They also considered prayer in the Temple as more effective than elsewhere. In the parable, Jesus tells us about two men who went to pray, a Pharisee and a tax collector. The self righteous Pharisee distanced himself by standing in the very front section of the Temple and his prayer was egoistic. In his prayer, he only enumerated the list of his pious acts namely praying, fasting and almsgiving and he never manifested any gratitude and humility. In short, the proud and self-righteous Pharisee did not really go to pray to God, but only to tell God how good he was in the guise of thanking Him. He did not pray to God but to himself. Besides his self boasting, he despised everyone, the tax collector and labeled everyone as a sinner. We should remember that there are two things which make our prayers less effective: self pride and contempt for others. On the other

hand, the tax collector stood at the back of the temple and he would not even lift his eyes to God. He confessed his sins and humbly asked for God's mercy: "**Kyrie, Eleison**"- "**O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.**" His prayer was humble, short, and heartbroken and it was addressed to God who accepted his prayer. The humble prayer of the tax collector was accepted and he went justified because of his humility, repentance, change of life, and total unworthiness.

**What is the difference between the two prayers?** The Pharisee claimed that he obeyed all the rules and regulations of the Jewish law and because of that he considered himself as a devout, law-abiding and model of self righteousness but in reality he ignored the Mosaic precepts of Mercy and Compassion. On the other hand, the tax collector who was considered to be a traitor, unclean and sinful by the Jew, truly stood justified in the eyes of God because of his humility. Although both the Pharisee and the Tax collector are sinners before God, Jesus however hears the prayers of the tax collector. Why? There is a difference in their prayer. The difference is that the tax collector realized that he was a sinner in the presence of God while the Pharisee did not realize his sinful nature. We need to evict the Pharisee and revive the publican in each of us and in our prayers.

**How to apply this reading in our life?** if we make a self introspection, perhaps we may identify the symptoms and syndrome of the Pharisee in our life like self righteousness, comparison and scorn for others. We need to get rid of self pride and allow the grace of God to activate our minds and hearts. Humility should be the hallmark of our Christian life because humility is the mother of all the virtues. We need to imitate the humble tax collector by acknowledging our total dependence on God and His grace for all our achievements and blessings. We need to confess to God daily for our sinfulness and ask His pardon and forgiveness. Our personal and communal prayers should have the necessary ingredients namely, adoration, praise, worship and contrite heart, in seeking the Lord's pardon and forgiveness. We need to present our needs and petitions to our Lord with trustful confidence. St. Augustine once said, "If you ask me what the essential thing in the religion and discipline of Jesus Christ is, I shall reply: first, humility; second, humility, and third, humility.

**Concluding prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, you are meek and humble of heart. We pray that You grant us the same meekness and humility so that God may reveal to us those things He has hidden from the wise and the learned. Give us the right wisdom so that, despite our academic qualifications, we may remain childlike before You because it is through humility that we will be able to serve mostly the poor, the sick, the needy and the least of our brothers and sisters. Deliver us from the desire of being loved without loving back. Remove from us the desire of being praised by others. Help us, Dear Lord, that we may desire others to be esteemed more than us. We pray all this in your most powerful name Jesus. **Amen.**