

Trinity XI

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Several years ago, a woman once told me how every Sunday before she left home to go to church, she would always invite her husband to come to worship with her, and how every Sunday he would just tell her the same thing.

He'd say, no, I'm not going to church. I'm not going to church because every church is just full of a bunch of hypocrites and self-righteous sinners.

To which one day the woman told me that she finally said, well then, I guess you will feel right at home. So why don't you come on over to church? Now the problem with judging others, or the problem with comparing ourselves to other people, is that either we will find ourselves failing to measure up, which will often cause us to fall into despair, or worse, we will find ourselves deceiving ourselves into thinking that we are superior to others, which will cause us to fall into the sin of pride, which is exactly what happened to the Pharisee in this morning's gospel.

For in this morning's gospel, our Lord tells the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. This morning, Jesus tells us, two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

And the Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

[1 : 54] I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I possess. But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but instead beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And then our Lord goes on to add, and I tell you that this man, that is the tax collector, went down to his house justified rather than the other.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. But again, again, the problem is, is that if we listen to this parable and we quietly think to ourselves, man, thank God that I'm nothing like that Pharisee, because, you know, there sure are a lot of self-righteous Pharisees in the church today, but thank God that I'm not like one of them, because I am so clearly more like that tax collector.

Well, if we're thinking that way, then we probably missed the point. Because the point of this morning's gospel really is not that we should be comparing ourselves to others, comparing ourselves to this Pharisee, or comparing ourselves to that tax collector.

No, the point of this morning's gospel is that we instead should be focused upon God. For that is exactly what the tax collector did.

[3 : 41] He focused upon God. He prayed, God, because his focus was God, he prayed, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

For the true worship of God, the true worship of God is not about us, and it is not about how righteous we think we are, or even about how justified we happen to feel.

No. The true worship of God needs to be Christ-centered and God-focused. Which is why each and every Sunday, our worship begins with a prayer.

A prayer for cleansing. A prayer which reads, Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.

Cleanse our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit. That is, cleanse our hearts, O Lord, so that we might remain focused on you.

[4 : 54] Focused upon Jesus. Focused upon our God and our King. And just in case we somehow missed all of that in the beginning, don't worry.

We will hear it again and again and again all throughout the liturgy. All throughout prayers, which the church has been saying for about 2,000 years, for right after we say the prayer of cleansing, shortly after, the very next thing is, Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us. For today, our Lord Jesus Christ tells us a parable. A parable of how two men went up to the temple to pray. One who looked to his own personal thoughts and feelings in order to determine his righteousness. And the other who looked to God. Yet out of the two, only one returned to his house justified. Therefore, this day and every day to follow, may our eyes remain fixed upon Jesus. [6 : 11] For in order for true Christian charity to abound, we must first be focused upon the giver of all things, the one who gives to us grace upon grace and mercy upon mercy in order that we might give just as we have been given. And that is, of course, our dear Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.