

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

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Date: 31 August 2025

Preacher: Fr. Wade Miller

[0 : 00] In this morning's gospel reading, there are no secrets to the meaning and understanding of our text from Luke chapter 18.

! St. Luke records a parable that is a story to expose the danger of those who put their trust in themselves.

Our Lord teaches us that self-righteousness leads to self-deception. And therefore estrangement from God. The two main characters in our gospel reading this morning consisted of a Pharisee and a tax collector.

The Pharisees were the expert theologians and mediators of the law of God. What I mean by mediators of the law is simply this, that Pharisees not only studied the law and knew the law, they then applied the law to the lives of the people.

The tax collector, on the other hand, was not esteemed at all. As a matter of fact, he was hated by the Jewish people. Tax collectors were certain ambitious Jewish men who worked for the hated Roman Empire.

[1 : 19] They were in charge of collecting taxes from their own people for the empire. Tax collectors were seen as traitors.

And they would often inflate the amount owed so that they would then pad their own pockets. That doesn't sound familiar at all. And they did this under the protection of the Roman authorities who simply looked the other way.

Tax collectors, therefore, were seen as dishonest thieves who preyed upon others. Jesus tells a story here in Luke chapter 18 where these two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector, they went up to the temple to pray.

The Pharisee said in his prayer, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I possess. Very humble man. We then hear the prayer of the tax collectors, we read, And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[2 : 52] Our Lord then does the shocking thing of extolling the tax collector over the Pharisee. As he says, I tell you, this man, that is, this tax collector, went down to his house justified rather than the other.

Why would our Lord side with a thief, a scoundrel, over an esteemed expert of the law? Wouldn't our Lord want to give his support to this Jewish theologian respected in the community?

Wouldn't he want to commend the guy that fasted? Wouldn't he praise the guy that gave money rather than stealing like this tax collector? Listen carefully to what our Lord is saying to us this morning.

He is not condoning thievery or shady business tactics. And he's not against tithing, fasting, praying, or keeping one from sexual immorality.

As a matter of fact, he exhorts all of us to do the above. What he's against, however, is virtue signaling and the outward expression of piety that is rooted in self-promotion and spiritual snobbery.

[4 : 19] He's against the appearance of righteousness that is rooted in selfish pride. Our Lord is against all who look down upon others while taking pride in their own spiritual achievements or piety.

He's against the internet trolls who want to pontificate behind a computer screen while never even going to church. He's against those who possess a form of religious romanticism that avoids personal responsibility and repentance.

And he's against those who sit back and judge others while failing to see the sin and the selfishness in their own lives.

What our Lord is simply saying to all of us this morning is that repentance and humility is to be our way of life. What our Lord is teaching us this morning is that charity, love, is more important than grandstanding or having a spirituality that is always comparing ourselves to others.

Such an attitude is rooted in individual superiority that is sinful and, quite frankly, wicked. What our Lord is calling us to do is to confess our sins, to repent, to turn away, and to humble ourselves before we begin comparing ourselves to anyone else.

[5 : 59] And that's why our Lord concludes this parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector with those words, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.

And he who humbles himself will be exalted. Therefore, the message this morning, again, is very simple. It's very simple to comprehend.

It's very hard to put into action. The message is necessary for all of us to hear. And that message is simply, continue to put your faith and your trust in Christ, not in yourself, and never, ever put confidence in your own intellect, your own ability, or your own perceived piety.

Do not compare yourself to others in order to pat yourself on the back. Instead, repent. Trust in Christ.

Live a life of humility while daily praying those words, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[7 : 12] Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.