

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

My beloved brothers and sisters, Tax Collectors were the most despised of people by the Jewish community in Jesus' time, because they were collaborators with the occupying Roman forces. They often exaggerated the amount of taxes owed by the people, and so, they were embezzling money from their own people. The Pharisees, on the other hand were the exact opposite, they were the religious people of their day, the most respected members of the society, but, they were often like the Church Ladies of Jesus' time. It was the tax collector whom Jesus praised, while he criticized the Pharisee.

Throughout the centuries, it is the prayer of the Tax Collector that has become the prayer of the Church: "Oh God, be merciful to me a sinner!" It is the complete summation of Christian spirituality. And the prayer makes our connection with God because it recognizes two things: First, it recognizes that God's greatest quality is His Divine Mercy. It means that He takes our wretchedness into His own heart.

The second connection is that the Tax Collector recognizes his infinite need for that mercy! He accuses himself of being a sinner, of failing to love God and to love others as we should. It is this prayer that is symbolized by the beating of his breast and downcast eyes. It is this prayer that Jesus tells us was heard by God; whereas, the prayer of the Pharisee was not heard. Why?

The prayer of the Pharisee has no acknowledgement of God's mercy, nor of his need for God. Indeed, the prayer of the Pharisee is an exercise in narcissism, the disease of our time, it leads only to the self and to self-admiration and not to God nor to our fellow human beings!