



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 everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Introductory Prayer: Lord, I believe in you. I believe that you have created me and redeemed me from sin. I believe that everything that is good in my life comes from you : my existence, my faith, my education, what virtues I have. I come to you today in prayer to place my life before you. I know that you are the source of all goodness in me. So often I wonder if I really know how to pray. I wonder how fruitful my prayer is. In the face of my misery I offer you the one thing I know I can offer: my humility before your majesty.

Petition: Lord, help me to be humble when I approach you in prayer

1. Parallel Monologues, Not Conversation: The Pharisee went up to the Temple to pray. We can assume that his intention was to talk with God. As he stood there in the Temple, he thought he was praying: he was in the right place, he was facing the right

direction, he seemed to be doing the right thing. But his prayer was contorted. In fact, it was not prayer at all; it was a self-righteous discourse. If a friend were to ask him the next day if he had said his prayers, he would have said, "Yes." Is my own prayer sometimes a false prayer like the Pharisee's? Do I think I am praying, doing all of the right things, but in reality, not praying at all and only justifying myself?

2. The Bare Minimum Does Not Satisfy: The poor Pharisee gets painted as the "bad guy" in this parable. However, he is not an outwardly evil person. He does not commit grave sins. He is honest, faithful to his wife, generous in his giving. But his pride blinds him to a much deeper relationship with God. He lives his religion as the bare minimum of not committing grave sins. His prayer is sterile. I must examine myself to make sure I am not doing the same, thinking I am doing all the right things but in reality, barely living my faith. God does not ask us simply to avoid evil. He invites us to do good. True generosity is what brings peace and fulfillment to our lives.

3. Humility: An Essential Element of Prayer: The tax collector is justified not because he has done all of the right things, but because he has the humility to recognize his own sinfulness. Perhaps he even heard what the Pharisee was saying and it moved him all the more to plead for God's mercy. One of the most important characteristics of our prayer is that it be humble. When we go to pray we must approach God recognizing our sinfulness and weakness and the fact that we have received everything good that we have from him. This is what makes our prayer fruitful. God loves a humble, contrite heart.

Conversation with Christ: Dear Lord, grant me a humble, contrite heart. You know my misery. I offer you the misery of my sinfulness so that you can purify it and do with it as you will. I do not want to live my life merely avoiding the big sins. I want to have a deep and intimate relationship with you founded on substantial humility.

Resolution: I will always make an act of humility at the beginning of my prayer.