

# Saturday 3rd of Lent

**Gospel text (Lk 18,9-14): Jesus told another parable to some persons fully convinced of their own righteousness, who looked down on others: «Two men went up to the Temple to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and said: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people, grasping, crooked, adulterous, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give the tenth of all my income to the Temple’. In the meantime the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying: ‘O God, be merciful to me, a sinner’. I tell you, when this man went down to his house, he had been set right with God, but not the other. For whoever makes himself out to be great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be raised».**

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*«I tell you, when this man went down to his house, he had been set right with God»*

Fr. Gavan JENNINGS

*(Dublín, Ireland)*

Today, Christ presents us with two men who, to a casual observer, might appear almost identical for they are in the same place doing the same thing, as both «went up to the Temple to pray» (Lk 18:10). But beyond appearances, at the deepest level of their personal consciences, both men differ radically: one, the Pharisee, has an easy conscience while the other, the tax collector, is racked by feelings of guilt.

Nowadays we tend to see guilt feelings as close to a psychological aberration: ‘beating oneself up over something’. Nevertheless the ‘guilt-racked’ tax-collector leaves the Temple in the better state for, «when this man went down to his house, he had been set right with God, but not the other» (Lk 18:14). «This feeling of guilt», writes Benedict XVI when he was still Cardinal Ratzinger ("Conscience and truth"), «disturbs the false calm of conscience and could be called conscience's complaint against my self-satisfied existence. It is as necessary for man as the physical pain

which signifies disturbances of normal bodily functioning».

Jesus doesn't lead us to believe that the Pharisee is not telling the truth when he says that he is not «grasping, crooked, adulterous» (Lk 18:11) and that he fasts and gives money to the Temple, nor that the tax-collector is delusional in thinking himself a sinner. This is not the question. Rather it is that «the Pharisee no longer knows that he too has guilt. He has a completely clear conscience. But this silence of conscience makes him impenetrable to God and men, while the cry of conscience which plagues the tax collector makes him capable of truth and love. Jesus can move sinners» (Benedict XVI).

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*«Whoever makes himself out to be great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be raised»*

Fr. David COMPTE i Verdaguer  
(Manlleu, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, in the midst of an image centered culture, this Gospel has a profound meaning. But let's take it one step at a time.

In the passage we are contemplating we see that in each person we can find a knot made of three strings. These three strings cannot be untangled unless each is taken into consideration at the same time. The first string relates to God; the second one to our fellowmen; and the third one to ourselves. Let us look carefully: those Jesus was addressing were «persons fully convinced of their own righteousness, who looked down on others» (Lk 18:9) but who, therefore, were not praying rightly. The three strings are always related to each other!

How can we properly put these relations into the right perspective? Which is the secret of untying that knot? The final conclusion of the sharp parable reveals it: humility. Saint Therese of Avila said it too: «Humility is truth».

It is true, though: humility allows us to recognize our own truth. Neither to swell with pride and vainglory nor to undermine us. Humility allows us to accept the gifts we receive from God as such, and to present him with our daily chores. Humility also allows us to recognize the qualities of our fellowmen. And even to be happy to discover them out.

Last but not least, a sense of humility must also be fundamental in our personal relationship with God. We must remember that, in Jesus' parable, the Pharisee lived

**a most righteous life; with his weekly religious practices and acts of charity! But he is not humble and that spoils all his other acts.**

**We are getting close to Holy Week. Soon we shall contemplate —once more!— Christ on the Cross: «Our Lord crucified is an unsurpassable testimony of patient loving and of humble meekness» (John Paul II). There, we shall see how, before Dimas' pleading —«Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom» (Lk 23:42)— the Lord responds with a “sudden canonization” without any precedent: «I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise» (Lk 23:43). That personage was a murderer who, before dying, was finally canonized by the very same Christ. It was a case hitherto unheard, for us, a consolation...: sanctity is not “manufactured” by us, but granted by God, if He finds our heart to be humble and converted.**