

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time The Lord Hears Our Prayers

So the summer is definitely over; there's no doubt about the weather being fall-like. In just a few more weeks, a new liturgical year starts with the arrival of Advent. Of course, we prepare for Christmas during the season of Advent. So today we're just nine weeks from Christmas. But for now we better just concern ourselves with the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the time in the Church when it's not Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, or a feast day. Since every Sunday is a special day in the Church, we remember that Ordinary in this case is simply a word indicating that the Sundays are in order. They are counted.

During the Ordinary Time Sundays we read in the Bible about the different experiences Jesus had during His all too brief time on earth and the different lessons He wants us to learn from His interactions with the people of the time. What we know about the people who followed Jesus while He was on this earth is that they were mostly poor, lowly people. They were oppressed by the Romans, who hated them and treated them poorly, especially if they were followers of Jesus. There's a word. *Oppressed*. To oppress means to hold down using force, either physical force, like the always present Roman Army could and would do to the Jews, or psychologically, because the Jews never had freedom to come and go as they please, to worship the way they wanted. Try to imagine what that might have been like. Try to imagine how sad and miserable you might be if you had to live that way. That would be oppressive. What about lowly? There's another word. *Lowly*. Lowly means low in value or position, such as the lowly peasant. What about another word? *Humble*. Humble means having a low opinion of your own importance, thinking of yourself as if you were lowly. The opposite of humble would be proud, having a high opinion of yourself, certainly not humble, a feeling of self-importance, like you think that you're really something special.

Well, that brings us to the first reading today, from the book of Sirach, who was a prophet. We remember that a prophet is a special person who hears the word of God and tells it to his people, including *us* through the Bible. Here's an interesting story. The prophet who wrote today's reading is referred to as Sirach. But Sirach was really the name of this prophet's grandfather, who was very wise and had much to teach. *This* prophet's real name was Jesus. But *this* Jesus lived two hundred years before the Jesus whom we know as the Son of God. Can you imagine how confusing it would have been if the book of Sirach went by the name of the book of Jesus? So that's the main reason why this prophet's book is called the book of Sirach. In today's reading "Sirach" describes what happens to the prayers of those who serve God willingly.

A reading from the book of Sirach (Sirach 35:12-14, 16-17).

The Lord doesn't have favorites, and you can't bribe him to cheat the poor. But he hears the prayers of all who have been mistreated. The Lord listens carefully to the prayers of orphans and the concerns of widows. If you gladly obey God, your prayers will reach beyond the clouds. The prayers of the humble go right through the clouds, and they are never satisfied till their prayers reach God. The Word of the Lord.

The first sentence tells us that it does not matter to God if you are weak or strong, rich or poor, a Yankees, Mets, or heaven forbid Red Sox fan, or whatever. The reading mentions two kinds of people we always hear about in the Bible as examples of poor, lowly, weak people, the orphan and the widow. Last week's gospel had a parable about a widow who kept asking a judge for a judgment in her favor. She kept asking and asking until he granted her wish, even though she was a lowly widow. So if wealth or importance doesn't matter, what does matter then? How about sincerity. There's another word. *Sincerity*. To be sincere means that you really mean what you say or do. You have to be sincere

in your devotion to God. You have to love God, and He will listen to you, whether you are rich or poor. Sometimes we have to pay attention to what He is saying when He answers us, or we might miss or misunderstand it. But if we are sincere in our requests, if we are humble in our prayers, those prayers will “reach beyond the clouds” and get God’s attention, whether we are rich or poor, strong or weak, girl or boy, old or young. And He will answer us.

Now let’s turn our attention to our Psalm for today, Psalm #34. Let’s recite the psalm...

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 34:1-2, 17-18).

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

I will always praise the Lord. With all my heart, I will praise the Lord. The lowly & helpless will hear me and be glad.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

When His people pray for help, He listens and He rescues them from their troubles. The Lord is there to rescue all who are oppressed, discouraged, and have given up hope.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

Before the psalm, weren’t we just talking about this same stuff? “The Lord hears the cry of the poor...The lowly will hear me and be happy...The Lord...saves those who are oppressed..” We were just talking about the oppressed and lowly from the first reading. Isn’t that amazing; the psalm is about the same thing!

Now to the second reading, today from second letter of St. Paul to Timothy. Remember Paul was a pretty active persecutor of the

early Christians until God knocked him off his horse and knocked some sense into him. Then Paul became a very active *preacher* of Jesus' message throughout the region, even as far away from Jerusalem as Rome. But Paul got a lot of people in Rome pretty upset preaching about Jesus, so he was thrown in prison. Back then prison was just a place to go while waiting until you were put to death. So he pretty much knew he was going to die for preaching about Jesus. But he didn't care. He knew what he had done was right. And he prayed sincerely to God, and he had faith that his prayers would be answered, and he would be rewarded (just like we read in the book of Sirach—hmm).

A reading from the second letter of Paul to Timothy (2 Tim 4:6-8):

Now the time has come for me to die. My life is like a drink offering being poured out on the altar. I have fought well. I have finished the race, and I have been faithful. So a crown will be given to me for pleasing the Lord. He judges fairly, and on the day of judgment he will give a crown to me and to everyone else who wants him to appear with power. The Word of the Lord.

Did it sound like St. Paul wasn't too sure what was going to happen to him now that he was in a Roman prison? No way! He was so sure of himself because he had faith that God heard his sincere prayers and was happy with the work he had done spreading the word about His Son, Jesus.

Now let's turn our attention to the gospel. In the gospel, St. Luke tells us about another one of Jesus' parables, the one about the Pharisee and the tax collector. They both went into the temple to pray. Who do you think prayed a humble and sincere prayer?

Alleluia, Alleluia. Alleluia, Alleluia.

God was in Christ, to reconcile the world to himself; and the good news of reconciliation he has entrusted to us.

Alleluia, Alleluia.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke (Luke 18:9-14).

Jesus told a story to some people who thought they were better than others and who looked down on everyone else: “Two men went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself at the front of the temple and prayed, ‘God, I thank you that I am not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful in marriage like other people. And I am really glad that I am not like that tax collector over there. I go without eating for two days a week, and I give you one tenth of all I earn.’ “The tax collector stood off at a distance and did not think he was good enough even to look up toward heaven. He was so sorry for what he had done that he pounded his chest and prayed, ‘God, have pity on me! I am such a sinner.’” Then Jesus said, “When the two men went home, it was the tax collector and not the Pharisee who was pleasing to God. If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honored.” The gospel of the Lord.

When Jesus told parables, He always chose the characters in the parable wisely and with a purpose. So here’s the prim and proper Pharisee with his fancy robe, a man of the temple, who has studied sacred Scripture. He prances up to the front of the temple where everyone can see him and boasts to God about what a great guy he is. Would you call the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable humble or proud? I would think proud, very proud. Don’t you think God knows this fellow, whether or not he is sincere and as good as he said he is? The Pharisee even dumps on the tax collector. Back then everyone dumped on tax collectors. Remember, to the people of Jesus’ day, tax collectors were rotten people who would take their money and get them in trouble with the Romans. So Jesus chose a tax collector to be compared to the Pharisee, knowing that the tax collector was likely a sinner, and the Pharisee

claimed not to be. So what the tax collector does is stay in the back of the temple and beat his breast, begging for God's forgiveness as a sinner. He knows that God knows what is in his heart and what he has done in his life. He is truly ashamed of his behavior. So he humbles himself and prays to God without any of the pride that the boastful Pharisee has. Whose prayer do you think is going to "reach beyond the clouds" and be heard by God and be answered? Obviously, the prayer of the tax collector is truly humble and sincere. Even though the tax collector is obviously a lowly sinner, the Lord hears his sincere prayer and will answer it, just like He hears the sincere prayers of the lowly widow and the poor, and St. Paul's sincere prayers. So pray humbly and sincerely to the Lord. He hears our humble and sincere prayers and will answer them.

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in today's readings. Speak with your parents about it.

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