

HOMILY FOR THE SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE

In The Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory Be To Jesus Christ! Glory Forever! Slava Isusu Christu! Slava Vo Viki!

Ladies, I want you to imagine for a moment that you and I are a married couple. I can imagine my good Pani right now thinking trust me ladies, you don't want to go there. But lets go there anyway.... You have been home all day and have been very busy. You've run a lot of errands, and done a lot around the house and you are exhausted. And I come home and the first thing I say is WHEN IS DINNER GOING TO BE READY, I'M HUNGRY. How would you feel about that? You probably would be ready to hit me over the head with a skillet. And I wouldn't blame you.

Now I want you to imagine this. What if I came home instead with a dozen roses, and said Hi Honey, I was thinking about you all day and missed you, here's a little something for you. Then, I said, something smells delicious. When is Dinner going to be ready, I'm hungry? Now I asked you exactly the same question, did I not? But, of course in a totally different way. Instead of hitting me with a skillet, you would probably offer me a smile and tell me to sit right down, that dinner would be ready in just a minute.

I know your wondering where am I doing with this.... I'll get there, I promise. These two scenarios point out in a very direct way the truth of the familiar expression, attitude is everything. It is not always what we say, or do , but rather how we say or do it that matters.

In today's Gospel reading, we are given a similar contrast. Two men went to the temple to do the very same thing, to pray. Both spoke words directed to God. However, the way in which they prayed was completely different. The Pharisee, the man who was a respected member of society, prayed with an attitude of superiority. He went up to the first pew and prayed with much fan-fare. He boasted about himself, that he was righteous, he fasted, he gave alms, he supported the temple and helped others. He bragged that he was not like the sinful tax collector or publican who sat in the back pew. The publican or tax collector, prayed very differently, he very humbly sat in the last pew, and with a heavy heart prayed, simply, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Our Lord, then very clearly at the end of this parable, tells us that God approved of the prayer of the sinful publican, and not the pharisee, because the publican prayed with humility and contrition. The pharisee was proud and boastful.

This Gospel reading that contrasts the attitudes of these two men is appointed to be read by the Church during this Pre-Lenten Preparation period to help us to get ready to begin our Lenten Journey. Today, we begin the four week preparation period, that is given to us to help us to map out our Lenten journey, to help us to formulate our travel Itinerary. This pre-lenten period is similar to the process we undergo when planning a vacation. I know many of us go on line to sites like Expedia .com or Travelocity when planning a trip. We begin by selecting flights if flying, and, pick hotels, rental cars and plan our itinerary. We make sure in doing this we get the best possible deal, and keep to an acceptable budget, even planning where we will eat and

how much we will spend. If we are not careful in planning our trip, we could overspend, run out of money, and get stranded with out lodging, and have a very miserable time.

The Church by giving us this preparation period is helping us to get ready for this most exciting and important journey. She does so by gently easing us into change of diet - as a matter of fact few realize that the week before Lent begins, we begin to fast from meat, so that when the first day of the Fast comes, it is easier for us to observe the strict fast. She prepares us for the Lenten Services by re-introducing us to the Lenten Service Book called the Triodion today, and the week before Lent begins, on Wed and Friday, we are given us a practice run of the Lenten services – with the New Testament readings being replaced with Old Testament readings. So you see during these next three weeks, the Church is helping us to plan and map out our Lenten Journey Itinerary, and prepare us for what is coming.

I recently read an excellent reflection that Fr. David Cochran wrote for his parish's monthly newsletter, about what Lent is all about. He pointed that Lent is all about change and growth. He also said that during Lent, yes our routine is changed, we change our diet, we go to Church more often, and pray more. He said something so true that really resonated with me.. He said if we go through Lent and do everything the Church asks us to do, but at the end, we have not changed even a little bit for the better, it will have been a waste of time. The purpose of the fast he reminded us is to literally change our lives for the better, so that we are closer to God than we were before Lent began. Lent is supposed to be spiritual vacation, if you will, where we go

to refresh our souls and regroup. We should come home from our Lenten journey like we would after going on an enjoyable, stress-free vacation, refreshed and rejuvenated.

Last Sunday the Church brought to our attention the Tax Collector Zacchaeus who was so excited to see the Lord that he ran on his pilgrimage to meet our Lord, and climbed a Sycamore tree so he could have a better view. Zacchaeus really, really wanted to see the Lord. When I think about him, I imagine him being as excited as young Matthew Booth was this past Friday, as he got on the plane to Arizona with his Dad and Grandma to see his favorite team, the Patriots who he has been following as long as he was old enough to watch football, play in the superbowl. If you are Bill and Monica's friend on Facebook, take a look at the picture they showed of Matthew smiling ear to ear, even though he was standing soaking wet in the rain. Now that was one happy boy, just like Zaccheus.

Today, building upon the example of Zaccheus, the Church in presenting to us the Gospel reading of the Pharisee and the Publican, is teaching us about the proper spirit or attitude we must possess to get the most out of our Lenten Journey, that of humility.

If you think about it, aren't the people we admire the most in life, not those who are big talkers, or boastful people who incessantly brag about themselves, our use the word, I over and over...? Isn't it instead, those who are humble, quiet people who are not talkers but doers, those who are strong in faith? In my life experience, it is people like my Baba who lived

humbly and prayed with tears, that have left the greatest impression on me. I will remember her until my dying day, her humility, who unselfishly cared for her boysiks as she called us, who never spent a dime on herself, who did not have a vain bone in her body and wore tattered clothing, saving every penny to send her grandchildren to college. I will remember her until my dying day

As we travel through this Pre-Lenten Season, may we all be inspired by Zaccheus and follow the humble example of the Publican and keep our attention focused on God, so we can truly change and grow during Lent.. Thinking back to the example I gave at the beginning of the homily, of Fr. ME the good husband as compared to Fr. ME the bad husband, let us remember in all that we say and do in life that attitude is everything. As the Psalmist David wrote in the famous 50th Psalm a contrite and humble heart God will not despise. May we grow in humility and in love this Lent so that we will indeed change and grow, and return home from our Lenten journey with a new heart, burning with love for God and all of humanity.

Christ Is In Our Midst! He Is And Ever Shall Be!