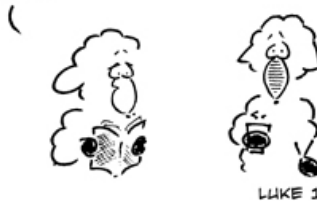


# LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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BOY, I'M REALLY *GLAD* I'M NOT LIKE THAT *PHARISEE*.



**THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN  
ORDINARY TIME**

**26th October 2025**

[WWW.AGNUSDAY.ORG](http://WWW.AGNUSDAY.ORG)

**Luke 18:9** Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: **10** “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ **13** But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ **14** I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

## INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Our reading (unique to Luke) is a direct continuation of last Sunday’s Gospel, really on the same theme of prayer. Luke often works with pairs of stories. The focus shifts, however, from persistence to humility, from disciples to Pharisees. Humility probably isn’t a great word today—even though it really means being down to earth (and not, of course, humiliation or low self-esteem).

Christian readers can find it difficult to identify with the Pharisee, always somehow “one of them” rather than “one of us.” But of course, the parable is not about them but about us truly. Even a good moral life can become a false basis for relating to God. Even prayer can become a matter of boasting.

### Thought for the day

Humility, humiliation, low self-esteem: these things get all mixed up in our minds and in our feelings. In the past, humility was encouraged by humiliation—really an abuse, which must have caused much harm. Low self-esteem—the root of many problems and addictions—used to be confused with humility. A robust humility is really an exercise in truth-telling about ourselves. If we are to be grounded in the humus (earth) of our human existences, then we do need to be honest in our appraisal, affirming the good and recognising courageously our faults. Humility goes with being human.

**KIERAN O’MAHONY OSA - [www.tarsus.ie](http://www.tarsus.ie)**

The Pharisee is a scrupulous observer of the Law, a faithful follower of his religion. He is comfortable in the temple. He stands with his head erect, confident of how good and great he is. Rather than pray, this man indulges in self-glorification. He doesn’t know what it means to pray. He is not aware of the mysterious presence of God, and neither does he recognise how small he himself is. It is stupid to come into the presence of God in order to enumerate our own good works and to despise others. This is the prayer of an atheist that is concealed beneath a cloak of piety. This man does not need God, does not ask him anything, nor does he need anyone.

The publican’s prayer is very different. He is aware that he has nothing to boast about, nothing to offer God, but much to receive from him: God’s forgiveness and mercy. His prayer is honest and sincere. He is a sinner but he is on the path to truth. He immediately finds the right attitude towards God - the attitude of one who has nothing but needs everything.

The Pharisee remains caught up in legalistic religion: for him, it is important to be righteous in God’s eyes and to be more observant than anyone else. The tax collector on the other hand, opens himself to the God of love that Jesus preaches. He has learned to accept the forgiveness and love of God in his life without boasting of anything or condemning anyone.

Two very different people are described in this story: the Pharisee and the tax collector. The former is doubtlessly a person of virtue and he is probably telling the truth about all the good he does. Likewise the tax collector was no doubt a sinner as it was common practice for them to make money by means of extortion. So what are we to learn from them? The first man is so full of himself that there is no room for God. The other man humbly acknowledges his deep need and goes home changed. For our prayer to be real, we need to come before God with empty hands.

**SEAN GOAN - *Let the Reader Understand, Year C***

Unlike last week's parable which focused on the widow alone, this week's presents us with two characters, the Pharisee (story of sin) and the publican (story of grace) and they are of equal importance. We (or others we have known) have lived both stories as individuals, but we have also lived them as communities – Church, ethnic groups, nations and cultures. The human family as a whole has been both Pharisee and publican.

Our meditation then will lead to two responses:

- ask God's mercy for the sin
- celebrate the grace.

We are also free to see a link between the two stories, and interpret the parable as tracing the journey from sin to grace. Consciousness of this journey will lead us to humble thanksgiving and also to petition that we (and others) will continue to make the journey.

**The Pharisee.** Ironically, it is easy to fall into the trap of reading the parable self-righteously. In fact the Pharisee of the parable is generally the kind of person we would consider "good". The text gives no indication that he was a hypocrite, as many Pharisees were. According to the text, he was upright and faithful to his religious duties. His two sins (they are always linked, both in the Bible and in real life) were that

- he did not humble himself (omission)
- he looked down on others (commission).

Remember a time when Jesus made you aware that (perhaps subtly) you, your community, or your family were taking pride in your high moral standards. He could have done this in different ways, some of them unexpected:

- one of your children or some member of the Church community criticized you,
- you found yourself committing a sin you never thought you would,
- a failure showed you that you were not as efficient as you thought you were.

However it happened, you celebrate the moment of grace.

**The Publican.** He too must be correctly interpreted. In Christian spirituality, he is often represented as someone without self-esteem. Jesus could not have presented us with such a role model; this would go against his entire teaching. We avoid this false interpretation by reading this section in the light of verse 14b. We identify the publican with people we admire deeply, whom we have "exalted" – parents, community leaders, entrepreneurs whose greatness is grounded in humility. They are self-confident but have no illusions about themselves and therefore do not despise others; they "dare not raise their eyes to heaven", but do not grovel.

It is important to give a correct interpretation to the future tenses "will be humbled" and "will be exalted". They can refer to the next life, but on condition that they are based on present experience. Our experience of the lowly being exalted points to (and promises) their final exaltation at the end of time.

**MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels, Year C**

### POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. There can be an element of defensiveness in our relationships with others. We are reluctant to let another see us as we see ourselves. Occasionally we meet someone with whom we can be totally open and know we will be accepted. With whom have you had that kind of a relationship? What was it like for you to have that freedom?
2. Likewise with God, when we come to prayer pretending to be better than we are, we are hiding from God. What difference does it make when you pray to God, acknowledging your faults and limitations? Have you ever found that when you are humble in this way in prayer, God lifts you up?
3. The parable is also a cautionary tale against judging others negatively on the basis of externals. Perhaps God, who looks into the heart, sees another picture. When have you discovered there was more to another person than the negative picture you got from first impressions?

**JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom**

While the two characters are contrasted for effect, at different times we embody the characteristics of each of them. Like the Pharisee, we can rush to judgement, even without realising we are doing so. We make presumptions about people based on their appearance, accents, background or occupation. We place ourselves on the 'inside', keeping others on the 'outside'. When we remember that all people have their struggles, we are a lot kinder. Both of the characters in today's parable would like to be at rights with God, but they have different understanding of what that relationship entails. When we come into greater awareness God's grace is there.

*The greatest insights in life can come from unexpected sources. Is there someone at home, school or work whom you could spend time getting to know, perhaps a person you have judged or written off in the past?*

*The prayer 'God be merciful to me' simply means 'God, please heal me' or 'God, please help me'. Find a quiet time and reset this phrase, sitting in the healing presence of God.*

**FIÓNA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT –Go Deeper**