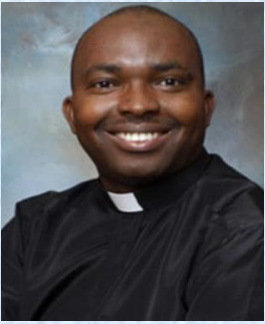


## Homily Rerun: October 23, 2016 ~ Fr. Seno



My dear people of peace, last Sunday we heard Fr. Bill talking about the parable how we should pray; not how God responds to our prayer. Today we hear another parable on prayer; prayer that is true and honest, the prayer of a humble person. And this is the type of prayer that is pleasing to God.

In our first reading from Sirach, which says that our prayer life must inevitably be connected with the rest of our lives. You cannot act one way and pray another way. Therefore, one requirement for prayer to be acceptable to God of justice, says Sirach, is that our lives must be just: that is, righteous, upright, wholesome and virtuous. He reminds us that God knows no favorites except towards the poor, the powerless, the voiceless and the oppressed.

The first reading forms the background of the gospel reading of today, in which Jesus continues the instruction on prayer with the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax collector. The Pharisee was full of himself. The key word in his prayer was “I”, “I”, “I”. He used his prayer to talk ill of his fellow human beings. He said, “O God I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity ... or even like this tax collector” (Lk. 18:11). He was completely unaware of his own sinfulness and he did not think he had any sins at all.

My dear friends, instead of examining his own conscience and confessing his own sins, he examined the conscience of others and confessed their sins – greedy, dishonesty, adulterous, and so on. The Pharisee had a very serious sin, which is the sin of pride. He was also vain and self-righteous, and he despised others. His sins were not so much bad deeds but bad attitudes. He had an attitude problem. He did not come to pray to God but to pray with himself. He came to inform God how good he was but not to pray. It would appear he does not really need God. Unfortunately we have many such Christians in the church who behave the Pharisee way especially some of us who label others as sinners.

The tax-collector stood afar in the temple away from the altar, to address God in prayer with eyes looking downward. He reflects the spirit of Psalm 51 in his prayer “O God be merciful to me a sinner.” He concentrated on his prayer to God and left the sins of others between them and God. He was very honest to himself from his heart before God. He made no attempt to hide anything. He stood before God and in all humility. As a result he went home at right with God. ‘The humble person’s prayer pierces the clouds’

My dear people of peace, we can learn from the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector, that there is that element of the Pharisee inside each of us. Like him we may be very conscious of the sins of others but blind to our own sins. It is easy to get into the habit of confessing the sins of others. But this is dangerous because it prevents us from looking at our own sins. Besides, it is impossible to weigh the sins of others without putting our own finger on the scales.

We can learn from the tax collector, how to confess our sins. Even though we may not be conscious of any specific sins, each of us can still say in all truth, ‘I am a sinner.’

My dear people, today many people approach the sacrament of Reconciliation with a prepared list of sins. Most of the things that appear on that list are trivial matters and do not vary much from one Confession to the next. No attempt is made to get down to the roots of their relationship with God and other people. Too much emphasis is placed on the sins, not enough on the fact of being a sinner. It would have been easy for the Tax Collector to produce a list of sins. But he did not do this, he did something better, and also harder. He said, ‘I am a sinful man.’ We too must be prepared to stand before God as sinners, as much in need of God’s mercy as the ground is in need of rain. What we have to face is not the fact that we commit sins, but that we are sinners. We are sinful, fallen people – that is the reality. Sin is not just an act or series of acts, but a condition in which we live. This is the great truth which the Tax Collector grasped. A great problem of our time is man’s failure to know himself, to recognize evil and deal with it within himself. People in support groups say that the turning point for them is when they can name their weakness.

The Pharisee was full of himself, the center of his own world. He had exalted himself. From that exalted position he looked down on others, some of whom he despised. This is the condition we sometimes find ourselves when we think that we have arrived at a spiritual level and we cannot fall and every other person is a sinner. The Tax Collector, on the other hand, humbled himself before God. He placed his hope in the mercy of God. We would do well to do the same. God prefers the broken and contrite heart that knows its failures over the complacent and arrogant one that claims never to have sinned.

Finally, for God to answer our prayer we need to be generous and humble in our prayers. That is to say we do not go into prayer carrying ourselves alone or wrapped only in our own problems forgetting that we are not alone. We ought to remember our fellow men in our prayer, even if they are enemies. We should not go into prayer concentrating solely on ourselves, relations and friends. We must also remember to pray for those who wronged us just as Jesus did while hanging on the cross.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, Make us humble and generous in our prayer! Amen. Love you all.