

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 29, 2007

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; Ps. 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23; Luke 18:9-14

Homilist: S. Rose Marie Hennessy, OP

We probably all have an image in our minds of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the temple. Part of that image repels us. Part of that image attracts us. Years of hearing of the two as examples of prayer have conditioned us to immediate surfacing of this image! Yet, maybe we have over simplified our image making.

Each day the “tax collector” extorted from the citizens. In our society who are these “tax collectors”? In the Gospel the tax collector’s prayer was authentic, true to himself, which is the meaning of humility.

Each day the Pharisee was engaged in efforts on behalf of the religious community. Who are the “Pharisees” in our society? In the Gospel his prayer was arrogant, righteous, boastful, the opposite of humility!

This image causes me to consider my prayer life! When am I a “Pharisee” and when am I a “tax collector” in prayer? Do I succumb to these stereotypes in prayer and in daily life? After all, we pray and minister daily on behalf of God’s Word? Doesn’t that permit us to look with disdain at the purveyors of violence and oppression in our world? Isn’t that what the “Pharisee” did?

At times the “Pharisee” and at times the “tax collector”...at times not recognizing my need for God’s mercy; at times conscious of the need for God’s mercy. At any given moment I see my sisters at prayer and in that image I want to recognize that all prayer is of the heart. At any given moment one may be “taking up one’s position” and the other “standing off at a distance”. But in praying we are living out our ever-active relationship with our God. At some moments that relationship, from our perspective, is true and at some moments it stands in need of truth. Those moments change throughout the day, not just at formal prayer!

“The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds!” We are the lowly, “Pharisee and tax collector”. Our authentic prayer pierces the clouds of heaven.

May our prayer, both boastful and humble, be a call for God’s mercy!