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Saturday's Gospel: Praying with the Heart

Gospel for Saturday in the 3rd
Week of Lent, and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 18:9-14*)

Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast

twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Commentary

Two men go up to the temple to pray. The first seems to pray to God, addressing a prayer of thanksgiving to Him, but in reality he is pointing to his own merits. He is looking at himself, praying to himself. Even in the temple he sees no need to prostrate himself before God's majesty; he is standing upright,

secure in himself, looking down on those who are not like him.

He is incapable of sincere prayer, of examining his heart and sentiments, and letting God remove all of his arrogance and hypocrisy.

The tax collector, in contrast, is humble and repentant. His prayer is very brief: “O God, have mercy on me, for I am a sinner!” He doesn’t try to look good.

While the Pharisee doesn’t ask for anything since he thinks he already has everything, the tax collector simply begs God for mercy.

Sincerity is needed in order to encounter God. With his heart open, showing his own neediness and acknowledging that he is a sinner, the tax collector shows us the necessary condition for receiving God’s forgiveness.

The path of prayer is thus the path of opening our heart, where God comes to speak with us.

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