

# TRINITY NEWS

## Prayer as a Way of Knowing Where our Life-Spark Resides

### The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector Luke 18:9-14

This parable opens with an obvious reference to the Pharisees. It can be taken no other way: **"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable" (Luke 18:9)**. The parable that follows has a trace of bitterness in it. It is unrealistic to think that Jesus would not have been bitter at times. Two men go up to the temple to pray. One is a Pharisee and one is a reviled tax-collector. The prayer of the Pharisee may be a caricature to show up a perceived deficiency in attitude. If it is not, then it is a withering indictment against the Pharisees. "The Pharisee stood up and prayed thus, 'God, I thank you that I'm not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even liked this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'" This is followed by the presentation of the tax collector: "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner'" The implication here is that the tax collector is correct in his self-assessment, while the Pharisee, who is entranced by his own piety, is deluding himself. The Pharisees were good people who did show compassion towards those on the margins of life. But they were castigated by Jesus when they failed to see the incidental cruelties of some of their assumptions and practices.

The self-assessment of the Pharisee here is taken to be false. There may have been a great deal more to his life than these words represent. Jesus' inference is that the matters raised by the Pharisee, pious though they may be, must not preclude humility. Prayer also must be heart-speech that reflects an awareness of one's own sinfulness before a holy God. Prayer is a long road. **God-awareness and prayerful reflections take time each day. The practical outcomes of focused compassion can flow from it.** We draw near to God in prayer so that we may enter the 'precincts' of heaven and return refreshed, and that is the persistent 'work' of prayer for all the years we have to worship our God on Earth.

## **Dialogue with the Text:**

How do we assess someone else's prayers? Indeed, how do we assess our own prayers? If we are to take Genesis 1:26-27 as a universal reference for all of humanity, then everyone on earth is walking around with the image of God in them, even the most devout atheist! It is buried deep in our psyche, our inner depths of soul. It requires a *logismos*, a "spark of the word" given by the Holy Spirit, to connect it with God. It is like a seed buried in a forest waiting for a fire to pass over it to warm it into life. It has to give up its own way of being as 'seed' in order to bring new life and more seeds. For us it means moving aside the necessary thought-construct that we know as "the ego" so that our real essence as a unique person can rise up within us to connect with the glory of God. It can actually be 'felt' rising up within us! We cease to be on automatic pilot, following our own mentally constructed dictates about who we are as a person. Then the words of prayer begin to flow and they are more spontaneous than we have felt before.

We have a connection with God, not only for prayer, but an awareness of God that 'plays' in the background even when we are not specifically thinking of it. We may even know the truth about who we are for the first time, and as our Lord said, that is freedom!

**Prayer is essentially connecting or trying to connect with that which is deepest in ourself that is itself connected to the depths of God.**

**Bishop Arthur Jones**

---

## **THIS WEEK:**

Wednesday.

- Bible Study, 10:00am
- Group discussion, 7:30pm, Parish office

Thursday.

- Midweek Eucharist, 10:00am, Chapel

## **NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:**

Isaiah 1:10-20; Psalm 32; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 11-12; Luke 19:1-10

## **TO PLAN:**

- **All Soul's Day, Wednesday, Nov. 2. Eucharist 10:00 a.m.**
  - **Remembrance Sunday, Nov. 13, 9:30a.m.**
  - **Joint Thanksgiving service, Sunday Nov. 20, 6:30 p.m., Union Church of Manila**
-