

livingtheword

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Hearing and Living the Sunday Readings

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

He spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else, 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a Tax Collector.

The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like everyone else, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get.

The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

This man, I tell you, went home again justified; the other did not. For everyone who raises themselves up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles themselves will be raised up.

Note:

- A *Pharisee* was a strict observer of the law. Going beyond what was required they fasted 2 days per week (Jews were only required to fast on 1 day a year) and tithed on everything they received (even the goods that had already been 'tithed'). They were extremely observant. They enjoyed their reputation.
- A *Tax Collector* contracted with the Roman authorities to collect road charges, goods tax, sales tax. They made significant profits above their contracted price. They were despised by Jews. They were classified in Jewish law with robbers and murderers to whom you did not have to tell the truth. They were not allowed to be judges or witnesses. For a tax collector to make amends, they were to pay-back overcharged taxes with an additional 1/5th to be added. The tax collectors situation was hopeless. They could never know everyone they had wronged and therefore could never repair their 'wrong'.

Reflection Questions

- What word, phrase or idea struck you in the reading?
- What do you think God is trying to say to you personally?
- Deuteronomy 26 involved bringing a 10th of ones produce to the temple, thanking God and asking for God's blessing, and giving to the levite, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow. Has this been fulfilled? Has the Pharisee done anything wrong? Is the Pharisee 'righteous'?
- What do the words of the Pharisee's prayer reveal about his attitude toward God and sinners?
- The Tax Collector is distraught. He beats his chest where his heart is located. He cannot bring himself to look to heaven. He humbly prays for mercy. Why is such a person justified - and 'raised up'?
- Righteousness is a most important OT concept. It was not only a relationship with God but also relationship with fellow beings. In fact righteousness was an honor given by the community (Israel to God), especially the poor, for gracious saving acts of love and mercy. If the poor give the honor of 'righteousness' what will this mean for you? What does this mean for entry into heaven if the poor are our 'judges'? Does this change your idea of 'righteousness'?
- What is one action that you will do to 'livetheword' this week?