

Homily

30 Sunday (C)

27 October

A new priest moved into the parish. One Saturday, a nice, warm day, he went to visit his parishioners. All went well until he came to one house. It was obvious that someone was home, but no one came to the door even after he had knocked several times. Finally, he took out his visiting card and wrote on the back 'Revelation 3:20' and stuck it through the letter box.

The next day, after Mass, he found his card in the collection plate. Below his message was the notation 'Genesis 3:10'. And so he got out his Bible and looked it up.

Now, his message to his parishioner had read:

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

His parishioner's reply, Genesis 3:10, read:

'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.'

Our Gospel reading is the story of two men: the Pharisee, a member of a Jewish sect known for its diligent observance of the Law, and a publican, a government official charged with the responsibility of collecting taxes.

They both enter the Temple, but with two very different dispositions. The Pharisee comes and openly boasts about his good deeds, thanking the Lord for not being like other men and especially like that tax collector. Being good, as he thinks and says he is, he has no reason or need to repent.

In contrast to the pride of the Pharisee, the tax collector places himself in a corner away from the people, where he can truly pray and repent of his sins 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

The pharisee tries to dress himself before God;

whereas the tax collector lays himself naked before God.

The tax collector knew very well that he didn't measure up to the law, and didn't claim to be good or holy. He comes to God with the only virtue he has: that of knowing how much he needs God's forgiveness. And stands in the only place he can: in the mercy of God.

This is not false modesty or self-deprecation, but that deep humility which comes from the awareness that nothing we do can ever **earn** us the love of God, and nothing we do can ever **deny** us the love of God.

It was his disposition of **humility** - of utter nakedness before God and his recognition of reality, that "justified" the tax collector. He received God's mercy, not because he deserved it or *thought* he deserved it, but because he asked for it through humble prayer.

What is our disposition as we come into the Lord's temple to worship this morning? How do we present ourselves to God?

Our gospel is quite clear that real worship goes beyond fasting, tithing, and reciting prayers. Real worship is more than telling God our achievements and successes in life. Our worship begins when we humbly admit our own sinfulness and faults against God.

The Lord is saying to us today that we have nothing to fear in approaching him just as we are. In fact, it is the *correct* way to approach him; otherwise we are just pretending; dressing ourselves up to be something we're not; trying to pull the wool over God's eyes – as if we ever could!

God will turn his attention towards us if we honestly admit who we are – sinners. Coming before him in humility and sincerity of heart gives us courage to face the dark areas of our lives and take a positive step to repent, believe and live the Gospel. If, by contrast, we are blinded by our pride and religiosity we will never experience the mercy and love of God.

Humble repentance before God opens us to God's grace and forgiveness. For the same reason in every Mass we ask God to forgive us, and again before receiving Holy Communion we say, "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

The Lord is waiting to fill us with his grace, forgiveness and love, if only we come before him in humble repentance saying like the tax collector, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."