

Homily of Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, 2025

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; Psalm 34:2-3, 17-19, 23; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

In today's first reading, Sirach reminds us that God is God of all but close to the distressed who call upon him. Sirach mentions the weak, the oppressed, the orphan, and the widow. These distressed (lowly) situations represent our situations. Sirach assures us, "... the prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds" (Sirach 35:21). Today's Psalm assures us, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves (Psalm 34:18). Psalm 50:15 also says "Call on me on the day of distress; I will rescue you, and you shall honor me." The palmist gives us a good insight about the first reading.

St. Paul wrote the second letter to Timothy in his moment of distress. He was in chains, deserted, and confined in a dark cold dungeon in Rome around 67 AD during the persecution of Christians by Emperor Nero. Shortly before his execution, St. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy who was the leader of the Christian community in Ephesus, to encourage him to remain strong in faith in his leadership of the Christian community and the work of the Gospel.

St. Paul was aware that his execution was coming soon and for that reason he wrote, "For I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance" (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Instead of "I have competed well," another translation says "I have fought a good fight."

Whether I see my journey on earth as a race or as a battle, the questions are: Am I persevering with my best effort in the responsibility God has given to me? That is, what fighting a good fight means. Can I say that I give my best shot when it comes to the practice of my faith? That is, what keeping the faith means. St. Paul says in the second reading, "... the Lord stood by me and gave me strength ..." Do I draw strength from the Lord by praying and trusting him?

When the time of my departure from this world comes, will I look back and say confidently like St. Paul that I have fought a good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith and waiting for the crown of righteousness?

Jesus gives us the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in today's gospel to help us to understand why some prayers "pierce the clouds," and why some prayers do not. "The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity — greedy, dishonest, adulterous — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'"

James 4:3 says, "You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives..." This is very evident in the prayer of the Pharisee. He took up his position and spoke his prayer to himself, glorifying himself; and then spoke uncharitably about others. He was arrogant and despised everyone else. St. Augustine regards this type of prayer as "praying in a fleshy, unspiritual manner."

When we are self-righteous, disrespect and despise other people, the Bible has some advice for us; “The one who despises his neighbor lacks sense” (Proverbs 11:12). Also, “The one who despises his neighbor sins” (Proverbs 14:21).

“The tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’” The tax collector prayed to God from a humble and a contrite heart. He prayed in the Spirit and from his brokenness. Jesus concludes, “I tell you; the latter went home justified, not the former...” and “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” The psalmist says, “A humble and contrite heart you will not spurn, O Lord” (Psalm 51:17). “The Lord is close to all call upon him, who call upon him from their hearts” (Psalm 145:18). St. Peter and St. James evoke the words of Jesus, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (1 Peter 5:6). “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble” (James 4:6).

We pray that God gives us the grace to call upon him and trust him in times of distress and at all circumstances. May God give us the grace to do our very best with humility and faith in him in our various life’s work. May God bring our good courses and purposes to perfection and completion. Amen.

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