

Scripture: *Luke 18:9-14*

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 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. 12 I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 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!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

This parable explains to us in a vivid way what is meant by the words of Scripture: *God resists the proud and gives Grace to the humble*. Pride is the greatest of the passions and the mother to all of them. It was pride that motivated Lucifer, after God created the angelic world, to start opposing Him and convincing other angels to follow him instead of God. Through his actions, Hell came into existence. It was pride that convinced our forefathers, Adam and Eve, tempted by the same Lucifer, to transgress against the only commandment given to them by God. By this prideful act, all of humanity became separated from God, necessitating intercession by the Savior to reconcile people with their Creator. And if we honestly look at what motivates us when we do something sinful, we will have to admit to ourselves that we acted out of our pride and self love.

At the same time, since we are greatly influenced by this world and its values, this parable could be a puzzle to us. Why would God reject the pharisee who appears to be a righteous man, living fully according to the teaching of His God and not like the evil sinners that he mentions, while accepting the prayer and justifying the publican who was a great sinner? What was God teaching us? The answer to this puzzle is found in the hearts of the two men.

The pharisee was so proud of his seeming righteousness that he became arrogant. True love died in his heart and was replaced but arrogant self love. He was righteous not because he loved God but because of the personal glory that they provided for him. There was no recognition that it was only through the Grace of God that he was able to accomplish anything. As the Savior in Scripture tells us : *without Me you can do nothing*. And through his estimation of his most-holiness, he felt justified in usurping from God the authority to judge people and condemn those whom he considered to be evil. His ego and not God was the authority in his life.

The publican on the other hand recognized the true nature of the life that he was leading. His conscience was awaking in him in full measure and was torturing him with regret. He also fully comprehended his helplessness in changing himself by himself. It was only God who was able to free him from his servitude to evil. So he came to God in full humility, not even daring to expect forgiveness, only hoping in God's mercy. His condition was exactly the condition that God wants for every one of us, for us to see ourselves as we really are and to come to Him for help. This is the condition that opens the door into our heart for Grace to enter and help us fight and overcome the passions that lurk there.

What a sobering wake-up call God is giving us through this parable. Too often, we are much more like the pharisee and need to be more like the publican. And to help us make the necessary correction to our spiritual life, our loving Savior dedicates certain periods during the year for us

to stop what we are doing and examine ourselves. Such a period is coming in several weeks with the start of Great Lent. Let us adequately prepare now in order that we firm up our will to be able during Great Lent to do what God is asking us to do. May God bless and strengthen all of us to do this blessed work.

With Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar