

My childhood Mission Sunday stories from home: Member of Little Flower *Mission League!*

How do we spend our time in the Church? “Why to pray? and how to pray?” Through the parable of the pharisee and the tax-collector at prayer, Jesus is teaching us that *true humility and repentance for our sins* must be the hallmark of our prayers.

In the first reading, from wisdom of Sirach, we have a perfect companion piece to the Gospel parable. In a striking image from Sirach, the writer declares “*the prayer of the lowly, pierces the clouds and it will not rest until it reaches its goal*”. In other words, Sirach tells us that the best prayer is *humble and selfless service*.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus reminds us that God hears the prayers of those who approach Him in humility, with a repentant heart. We have two persons, praying: the P&P. Only the prayer of one of the two was accepted. And why? What did the Pharisee do? He made too much of himself. Though solemn and serious, he was not reverent. His words were proud and haughty. His prayer was self-exaltation and self-glory, he is telling God that he was not as evil as other people. He informed God that he is free from sin, but he judged with despise and contempt the publican behind him. God did not answer the prayer of this Pharisee.

Look at the tax collector, and see how he came to worship God! He stood far off. He couldn’t lift up his eyes to heaven, as he is repentant of his sins. Fully aware of his unworthiness, with crossed hands over his chest, his words were few and almost broken. His conduct, humble and reverent. He felt before all Holy God that he is a poor sinner, and said: “*O God, be merciful to me, a sinner,*” *This*

*prayer* was heard because he humbled himself, acknowledging his sins, and pleaded for God's mercy.

All of us are sinners before God, and we, like the publican, therefore need to come to God. We need to overcome the Pharisee within us and revive the publican. As St. John Newman says: Everyone need to come to church, like the publican did, to say in his heart: *Lord I am not worthy to enter this sacred place! My only prayer for coming is the merit of Jesus my saviour*".

There can be occasions that someone may enter the church carelessly, sitting restless and distracted; and may become judgemental about what is happening around. Would such an attitude help them to *meet the Lord in His house*?

Today, Jesus challenges us to imitate the humble publican; by acknowledging our total dependence on God and His grace for all our achievements and blessings; by confessing to God our sinfulness and asking for His forgiveness; by praying for God's mercy and continued support through His grace; by asking for the strengthening of the Holy Spirit; and by becoming more sensitive to the needs and feelings of others, serving the Lord in them as best as we can. Let us pray every day: "*Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.*"