

Trinity XI

August 11, 2024

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11 & Luke 18: 9-14

“Be who you were created to be, and you will set the world on fire.”

How true, how important, are these words of St Cathrine of Sienna (March 25, 1347 – April 29, 1380), a great Saint and doctor of the Church! Yet we know that these words are not easy to realize in our lives. It is not easy to be who we are created to be. It is not a pleasant thing to show people around us how weak we are, and how vulnerable we are. But that’s the issue that Jesus addressed in today’s gospel. The publican in our story has a kind of faith that sets his world on fire. This faith results from his humility, the kind of behavior that the Pharisee didn’t have. What I mean by that is that in requesting, even begging God to forgive his sins, the Publican unleashed the merciful power of God over himself. My friends, there is a power in being humble.

There is a prayer I find remarkably interesting and it’s about humility. It’s been around for a few hundred years now and it serves as a great reminder as to the power of humility. It begins by asking the Lord Jesus - Himself meek and humble of heart - to hear the prayer. It then runs through a list of qualities for which we need deliverance. We need Jesus to deliver us from the desire to be esteemed, loved, extolled, praised, preferred to others, consulted, approved by our peers, etc. Next, it turns to our fears. We need Jesus to deliver us from the fear of being humiliated, despised, rejected, forgotten, ridiculed, wronged, suspected, and having our reputation attacked. Finally, the prayer asks Jesus to grant us humility by reshaping our desires so that we can lift others above ourselves.

The Publican in our gospel knew this lesson very well. He exemplifies what Jesus spoke about in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Being poor in spirit means admitting we have nothing to offer to God to atone for our sin. We come to God as empty, impoverished, despised, bankrupt, pitiable, desperate beggars. The tax collector recognizes his sinful condition and seeks the only thing that can bridge the gap between himself and God. “Have mercy on me,” he cries, and we know from the end of the parable that God heard his prayer for mercy and answered it. Jesus tells us that this man went home “justified.”

If we are truly broken-hearted over our sins, we can be assured of God’s boundless love and forgiveness in Christ. He has promised in His word to accept us, love us, and make us alive again through His Son (Colossians 2:13). No amount of good works, church attendance, tithes,

community service, loving our neighbor or anything else we do is sufficient to take away the blot of sin and enable us to stand before a holy God on our own.

We are not to follow the culture to compare ourselves with others. Because when we do that, we end up despising them.

Jesus specifically warns us against this attitude at the beginning of the parable. When we try to justify ourselves by comparing ourselves to others, we naturally end up despising them. Our standard for comparison is God Himself, and we all fall short of His glory (Romans 3:23).

May the Lord be the mark of our character, and may He give us the grace to become what he has created us to be.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, let not the foot of pride come nigh to hurt us. Allow us stand on your grace each and every day, trusting in the saving work of Jesus at the cross and growing us in holiness as we wait for the Last Day. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.