

St. Louis Catholic Church

Saturday of the 3rd Week of Lent

Hosea 6:1-6

Luke 18:9-14

Talk is cheap! You can find it on any street corner. God has always wanted our hearts more than empty words or sacrifices. The reading from Hosea is a preview of the reading yesterday when God and the people were restored. Today's reading shows the people urging one another to return to the Lord. But their motivation is only to avoid the circumstances they had brought upon themselves. They are overly confident that God will be merciful as in the past. They say God will come like the dawn of a new day and like Spring rain that transforms the earth into a lush garden.

God sees through their weak attempts. "What can I do with you?" God will be a healer but He wants them to sincerely choose to return and not merely say so in words. Talk is cheap. You can find it on any street corner.

You know it can also be found in the Temple or in the Church. God still looks for our hearts. Two men are in the Temple in today's Gospel. One a Pharisee and one a tax collector. The Pharisee takes a prominent place and begins his prayers. Like many people in our circle today, the Pharisees favorite pronoun, word or letter is "I". His prayer is really to himself and not to God. I'm not like others--greedy, dishonest, adulterous--or even like this tax collector. It's interesting that the tax collector was off at a distance and therefore the Pharisee is looking around while he prays. Whose noticing? Look at me. It's all about me. I fast and I tithe.

Jesus is always trying to remove any obstacle that threatens to impede people's journey in life. The obstacle in this story is pride.

The Pharisee is too full of himself to make a pure prayer to God. He regards himself as superior to others. He is so caught up in himself that he can't focus on God. Also it's easy to lift yourself up by finding people in life who are obviously less thought of by society. If I put you down then I stand taller.

I can write this reflection by saying I'm a pretty good priest because I haven't blown up a building, raped anyone, or stolen anything. I go to Mass almost everyday. Yea Me!

The tax collector is a much more intriguing example. He is thought of poorly by society and certainly this Pharisee. Yet his prayer reveals how wrong they were because he is lauded by God. He stands at a distance, not feeling worthy to move beyond the Temple entrance. He is so aware of his weaknesses that he does not even presume to raise his eyes to God. He takes no notice of anyone else in the temple. All he asks is forgiveness. He is humble and the one who humbles himself is exalted.

God's ways are not our ways. God is not a bookkeeper or a heavenly CEO. He does not wait for us to do something like the Pharisee and then give points. Today's Good News undermines everything in our culture that would suggest that this is the way the universe operates. God operates differently.

To stand before God with a humble, honest admission of our imperfections and sins is the key to true, effective prayer. The tax collector asked for mercy from God and received justification from God. Each day our prayer can be effective if it begins with a plea for mercy. The Pharisee asked for nothing and received nothing. Lent challenges us to take a good look at ourselves. Yes there are terrible criminals and sinners who would appear to be worse citizens. Lent says focus on our own sins and seek God's mercy. He forgave the thief on the cross so He can forgive those criminals and sinners as well. We want to know that we are in the number who receive mercy.

The Pharisee like the people of Hosea's time did not make a good or even imperfect Act of Contrition. Lent is the time. Pray for enlightenment to recognize all sins. Pray the Scriptures and know the mercy of God but also His call to growth and perfection. Examine your conscience. Go to the Sacrament of Penance. Humble yourself. Hear the words of forgiveness. You will be exalted by the Lord. These are true words. They are not cheap. You really won't find them on most street corners.

God Bless,
Msgr. John McArthur

Key Events This Week:

1. Today--Men's Morning of Spirituality--8:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.--St. Francis of Assisi Church
2. 40 Days for Life--Anytime--My Time (Feel free to join) 2:00-3:00 p.m.
3. Sunday--Commitment Weekend--Bishop's Annual Appeal
It's Our Church
40th Anniversary of Its Founding
Every Family--Every Individual--Keep the Light Burning
Bring pledge card--After Homily/Video--All Come Forward
Place Card in Basket
--Goal \$439,000--All are needed
--Goal 100% Participation--You all are needed