

I overheard three little girls bragging about their respective Grandfather's after school the other day. The first little girl said, "My Grand Dad scribbles a couple words on a piece of paper, he calls it a poem, and they pay him \$50." The other little girl says, "That's nothing. My Grandpa scribbles a few words, beside his ole guitar, he calls it a song, and they give him \$100." The third girl says, "I got you both beat. My Papa scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a homily. And it takes eight people just to collect all the money!"

We do live in impressive times with the universe seemingly at our fingertips. Moments we spend in childlike wonder and awe are short and thought by some as play or wasteful. We have grown so impressed with our achievements that we sometimes lock ourselves up in a state of loopback. From the desire to become an object of adulation we over-indulge in ourselves and cause a communal malfunction. Unlike the posture of wonder and awe, that gazes outward in humility, loopback locks its attention inward never seeing beyond itself. It allows great things to be expressed, but only about one's self. Even if the conclusions be accurate at some point a penitent's self-examination needs to move us beyond.

In the same way, prayer must also take us to someone beyond ourselves. We are designed for belonging and communion, not isolation.

Two characters at opposites of the social hierarchy are the subject of Jesus' teaching in our Gospel account today. The Pharisee who looks like he's doing everything right and the tax collector; who most imagine, can do nothing right. However, when we listen to the prayer that each give, we notice their stark contrast. The Pharisee is proud and suffers spiritual loopback. His prayer cannot go very far because he is stuck worshiping himself. He says, Oh God, but he should really say, Oh my. In his boasting he only seeks the spotlight.

Just listen to how great he imagines himself and he's telling God all this! He's not like anybody else around that temple or even within humanity. And he's especially nothing like the tax collector. Well on that point he is correct, because the tax collector knows something important about himself, whereas, this Pharisee has fallen victim to his own charms. Like the mythological, or maybe not so mythological character Narcissus. Does he expect God to worship him? The Pharisee is caught in a form of idolatry.

There is but One, True, Beautiful and Holy God, and those to whom Jesus addresses this parable today, are looking at him. It is not the Pharisee, nor, is it you or I.

After a simple greeting, the structure of our Mass intends to associate us with the tax collector's attitude. We confess to Almighty God and to one another, the truth of our human frailty. The attitude of the worshiping disciple is always to be in recognition of our lowliness and dependence on the Creator's graciousness. This is how we begin our public and this how we ought to begin our private, prayer to God.

To be acts of true worship; sacrifice, penance and prayer must be connected to others. To offer God prayer taken from the poor or to practice penance without interior reform is a mockery worthless in the sight of God. But, "the prayer of the lowly, pierces the clouds and does not rest until it reaches its goal". The prayer of the boastful, on the other hand, fails to aim properly. In its state of spiritual loopback, it isolates itself from communion. It has only one destination and that is the short distance to itself. It will surely miss the mark, by 180 degrees, which is how sin is defined. Friends, take the loopbacks down in our lives and go out to encounter God.

We have all by our human nature missed the mark and sinned, but believers know that sin is not the condition for which humankind is designed. Our brother Jesus comes in this Eucharistic worship to release us from loopback and show us the way to our Loving Father.

Paul reminds Timothy and us what is the reward for breaking free of self-absorption and ego. Now if there is ever an Apostle who was freed of spiritual loopback, it is Paul. Upon his awakening and conversion Paul becomes largely responsible for bringing Christianity to Europe and beyond. We, the Gentiles in this assembly today are the beneficiaries of Paul's great missionary work.

Throughout October, in addition to being dedicated to Mary, Mother Church calls attention to our missionary nature. Through baptism, we are made a missionary people, called to give representation of the Holy Trinity. Just as Jesus is sent from the Father, so too from Jesus, the Holy Spirit is spirated into the affairs of the Church. We can well reason that God is a missionary. The Church then invites us to pray throughout October in a special way for all missions.

And brothers and sisters may our prayer and worship always take us beyond ourselves and deep into the life and service of our holy and magnificent God.

Amen.