

OCTOBER 27, 2019
Sunday of the 30th Week in OT
Luke 13: 22-30

“GOD, BE MERCIFUL TO ME, A SINNER.”

On March 20, 2013, a day after his papal inauguration, Pope Francis visited and prayed at the 5th century Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, the Cathedral of the Bishop of Rome. He carried a small wreath of yellow and white roses for the Blessed Mary. On the way back to the Vatican, Pope Francis asked his driver to stop at the Domus Internationalis Paulus VI, the hostel for visiting foreign clergy in the centre of Rome where he stayed for the two weeks before the conclave. He asked for the housekeeping staff and thanked them. Then he handed them a credit card to pay for his stay and said, “Don’t forget to add on the phone calls.” The staff protested that, as Pope, it was unnecessary that he should pay. Pope Francis said, “On the contrary that is precisely why I must set a good example.” While they prepared his bill, he asked a man behind the desk if he has a bulb for the bedside lamp which, he recalled, had blown. A bulb was produced, then he went upstairs and pack his things. When staff went up to the room after Pope Francis had descended with his battered black suitcase and old briefcase, paid his bill and returned to the Vatican, the bulb had been changed. Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis Untying the Knots*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, Great Britain, p. 172.

Last October 6, the 27th Sunday in Ordinary time, we asked Our Lord Jesus Christ to "Increase our faith" (Luke 17: 5). We reflected on the disciples asking to increase their faith not because they wanted more but how to put their faith into action. Faith gets its character by how it is put into action. Faith must include standing up and acting based on beliefs. While last Sunday, October 27, we talked about praying persistently, an example given to us by the widow asking justice to the unjust judge. We pray because we would like to open the channel of communication between ourselves and God. We are the one tuning into God's way of thinking not Him being dictated to by us and the way we see things. When we pray, we are showing that we trust Him, that we depend on Him, we adore Him. It increases our faith.

Every prayer must always begin with gratitude like the ten lepers in our gospel last October 13 when the Samaritan returned, prostrated himself and gave thanks to Jesus. And in return Jesus said, "Your faith has saved you". Therefore, gratitude increases also our faith.

In our gospel for today, we see a third step of prayer – to repent. When we praying, we need to thank Him, adore Him and ask forgiveness from Him. There are a lot of blessings we received from God but still we ignored Him, we despised Him through our sins. To repent means we return to God and we can take the example and prayer of the tax collector: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." (Luke 18:13 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA) The tax collector humbled himself and was exalted by Jesus. When we have genuine humility, we only recognize the essential truth about ourselves. This is an honest self-assessment, in the presence of God, with no deceptions, pretences, or masks. The best option will always be a humble heart because in the presence of God who is holy and powerful, He knows that we are weak, imperfect and indeed sinful and with this we recognise our need for mercy. He knows us through and through, all our failings, miseries and offenses.

On the other hand, what is wrong with the Pharisee, if there is any? Remember, he leads an admirable life, gives good example within the Jewish tradition by keeping all rules, from fasting and almsgiving to honesty and purity. There was real attempt there, he tried to be holy within his tradition. But what him different from the Publican? He forgot that he remained weak, sinful and imperfect like other people in the presence of all-holy and powerful God. His prayer is not to thank and praise God but centered on himself: despising others and giving thanks for his own qualities and abilities. It turns him from speaking to God to talking about himself.

My brothers and sisters, how do we pray? What are we praying for? Do you speak to God with humility and love or the topic of our prayer is myself or the faults of others? Do we say sorry to people whom we hurt? Ask forgiveness from your husband, wife, friends, our parents and even to our children because the more we bow down, the more we are exalted in the eyes of God. When we do this, we are not weak or shaky but strong and resilient, and that makes us children of God.

My brothers and sisters let us follow the example of the Publican, the tax collector by asking the mercy and forgiveness of the Lord. Let us always remind ourselves that we are sinners and we can only be forgiven when we are humble, that is, accepting our own sinfulness. That's why we always begin our Mass by saying "I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do..." So, be humble, forgive, understand, love and be patient.

Let this be our prayer: "Lord Jesus, may your love, mercy, compassion and truth transform my life - my inner thoughts, intentions, and attitudes, and my outward behavior, speech, and actions. Where I lack charity, patience, kindness, and understanding, help me to embrace your merciful love and to see the goodness of my neighbor, especially my children, my husband, my wife and those people whom you gave me. May I always love as you have loved me and forgive others as you have forgiven me. Amen."