

IHS
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost—9 August AD 2020
Ave Maria!

“Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled.”¹

Today's Gospel is one of those that seem a little backwards at first look: The Pharisees were the descendants of the Machabees, men who fought for Israel and for the Temple shortly before the birth of Christ, and were highly honored in Israel. Publicans were tax collectors, thought of as traitors to Israel, as they collected taxes from Jews on behalf of the Romans. Indeed, they sometimes brought the wrath of the Roman Army down on their fellow countrymen.

If we take the two men at their word, the Pharisee seems to be a good man, doing the right things. And the Publican seems to be a sinner, not to mention a hated tax-collector. And yet our Lord seems to be disapproving of the good man, and approving the bad one.

Well, obviously, our Lord is not endorsing sin, or disparaging goodness. What He is pointing out is the value of humility, and the danger of pride.

And, for the most part, we don't much trouble in understanding what He is getting at. Because whenever we encounter such proud people as this Pharisee, they annoy us just as they annoyed our Lord. There is very little that is more difficult to take than to have to listen to someone talk about how good they are, or how successful, how wealthy, how good looking, or whatever. We are even bothered by false modesty, when people are vocal in claiming to be something less than they actually are. Simply stated, we tend to dislike people talking about themselves a great deal; particularly if it is obvious that they are not being truthful.

We can easily see that pride--considering our self to be more important than those around us--is an important part of most of the sins we commit. Adam and Eve sinned, because they thought the devil was giving them the opportunity to be equal to God. The fallen angels fell

¹ Gospel: Luke 18: 9-14 <http://www.drbo.org/x/d?b=drl&bk=49&ch=18&l=9-#x>

for the same reason. And when we consider ourselves to be more important than we actually are, there is a great temptation to think that such “importance” puts us above the divine law. “I am so important that I have the right to take my neighbor's property, or take his wife, or violently abuse him. In fact, I'm so important that I don't even have to concern myself with God Himself.” So there seems to be a connection between this false pride and the motivation to sin.

If it annoys us to have to listen to such arrogant people, imagine being God—knowing all truth, and seeing all things in true perspective—and having to listen Your creatures telling You how wonderful they are. And that is what our Lord is focusing on in today's Gospel; how God wants us to examine our conscience truthfully, and to recognize that there is always room for improvement.

The Epistle mentions that there are a diversity of graces that can come to us through the working of the Holy Ghost.² That ought to bring to mind the Seven Sacraments, the normal way in which Christ gives us the graces to live and die as a good Catholic. We are born again, strengthened and nourished, provide for posterity, and are prepared for death through the working of the Holy Ghost in the Sacraments. The life of God is made to live in our souls. As the Epistle says, the Holy Ghost gives us gifts like wisdom, and knowledge, and faith.

St. Paul mentions some of the more exotic graces that the early Catholics received in order to establish the Church; he speaks of miracles, and healing, speech in foreign tongues, or understanding languages not learned.

But he closes with a statement that these more exotic gifts are not something we can strive to possess. They come only as the free gift of God. “All these things are the work of the one Holy Spirit, who allots to everyone as He wills.” They are given by God only when they are necessary to accomplish God's purposes in the world: “The

² I Corinthians XII:2-11 <http://www.drbo.org/x/d?b=drl&bk=53&ch=12&l=2-#x>

manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit.” In other words, if and when God does give such special gifts, they are not for the honor and glory of the recipient, but for the public good of the Church.

I mention this, because one of the errors being spread in the modern church is that anyone and everyone, can and should, be “open to the Spirit” and speak in unknown tongues, and prophecy, and perhaps heal the sick. If you go to the more “progressive” churches, you will find that they want to lay hands on you, and anoint you, and “slay you in the spirit,” and whatever else, in order to produce all of these gifts.

Clearly such “Pentecostalism” is nothing other than tempting God, demanding of Him something He has not promised; a personal pipeline of divine revelation—clearly at odds with what St. Paul tells us about the gifts of the Holy Ghost; that they are given as God wants, and not as we demand—that they are given to work God's purposes and not to give us a new “trick” to boast about.

And that brings us right back to our Lord's teaching in the Gospel: Pride is a detestable thing. It is detestable on the merely human level, for no one cares to hear boasting and falsehood. It is the root of virtually all sin. And it is certainly detestable when we boast before God, or try to demand divine favors to seem more important than those around us.

God humbles everyone who tries to exalt himself but he also exalts those who humble themselves and that's a pretty easy choice, isn't it?