

First Reading

A Reading from the Book of Sirach (Sirach 35:15-22)

The Lord is a just judge, and with God there is no partiality.
The Lord will not show partiality to the poor,
but will listen to the prayer of the one who is wronged.
The Lord will not ignore the supplication of the orphan,
or the widow when she pours out her complaint.
Do not the tears of the widow run down her cheek
as she cries out against the one who causes them to fall?
The person whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted
and their prayer will reach to the clouds.
The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds,
and it will not rest until it reaches its goal;
it will not desist until the Most High responds
and does justice for the righteous and executes judgment.
Indeed, the Lord will not delay.

The Word of the Lord

Psalm 34

Second Reading

A Reading from the Second Letter of Paul to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:6-18)

Beloved, I am already being poured out like a libation,
and the time of my departure has come.
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord,
the just judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me
but also to all who have longed for Christ's appearing.

Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world,
has deserted me & gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to
Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful
in my ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak
that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm;
the Lord will pay him back for his deeds.

You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.

At my first defense no one came to my support, **but** all deserted me.

May it not be counted against them! **But** the Lord stood by me &
gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed &
all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.
The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack & save me for a heavenly kingdom.
To God be the glory forever & ever. Amen.

The Word of the Lord

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (Luke 18:9-14)

Jesus /addressed this parable /to those
who were convinced /of their own righteousness /
while holding everyone else /in contempt: /

“Two people /went up to the temple to pray; /
one was a Pharisee /and /the other was a tax collector. /
The Pharisee, /standing alone, /prayed in these words: /
‘O God, /I thank you that I am not /
like the rest of humanity /
–greedy, /dishonest, /adulterous /
– or /even like this tax collector. /
I fast /twice a week, /and /
I give /a tenth /of my whole income.’ /

But /the tax collector, /standing far off, /
would not even /look up to heaven; /
but /was beating his breast /and saying, /
‘O God, /be merciful to me, /a sinner.’
I tell you, /this tax collector
went home from the temple /justified,
but / the Pharisee did not.”

For if you /exalt yourself, /you will be humbled, /
But /if you humble yourself /you will be exalted. /

The Gospel of the Lord

Homily for the 30th Sunday, C Cycle – St. Mark's Lutheran / SUNY Oneonta

♪ The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Blessed be the Lord.

Let the lowly hear and be glad: the Lord listens to their pleas;
And to hearts broken, God is near, who will hear the cry of the poor.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Blessed be the Lord. ♪

Peter: Do you know anyone/who is reflected by that song – a setting of the Psalm 34 we prayed today? Have you ever felt like one of those whose hearts was broken? I know I have, especially during the first 3 yrs. after Hurricane Irene washed away almost everything in my house, & while I searched for a new place to live for 2 ½ .

Who are you in the story we just heard? – The parables of Jesus are like mirrors – he intends that those who hear them look at the story & see themselves, both the parts that they like & the behaviors they would rather not admit. Sr. Anna and I have seen ourselves in both the **Tax Collector** & the **Pharisee**.

Anna: We brought some things /that could be metaphors/ for both characters: /
Hold up: Empty glass of water / Full glass of water

Which is the **Tax Collector**? / [the empty glass] ~ Which is the **Pharisee**? / [the full glass]

Peter:
The **Pharisee** was someone who kept all the rules, & went beyond them! Here **he** was, at a public worship service at the Temple, making sure **he** was not too close to anyone else, for fear **he** might touch someone who is ritually unclean.

He was saying out loud that **he** fasted twice a week [other **Pharisees** fasted 12 days a year & that was considered a lot – the law said you only had to fast on **Yom Kippur**, which was Oct 12 this year]
He paid tithes – a tenth of what he earned – on **everything**,
not just certain things, while for other Jews there were a lot of exceptions.
He was a pharisee's **Pharisee**! A hero in his own mind! The main character in his own video game.

Anna: The **tax collector**/was one of those/who were most despised/by the Jews of that time./He was a Jew who worked for the Romans. / He was one of "Them,"/ someone/ who collaborated with/an oppressive government./ And/when he prayed, out loud,/he stood far off/because/ he did not/even feel worthy/to look at God.

He beat **his** chest, / something that only **women** in the Middle East / ordinarily did. In the Bible, / the only other case of people beating their chests / is at the cross / when the crowds did so / just after Jesus died. [and there were both men and women in the crowd] /

The words **he** said were, / "O God, / be merciful to me, / a sinner." / In fact, / the Greek words **he** used / literally mean, / "O Lord, / make an atonement / for me," / words which reflect / **both** / what was happening at the Temple service / and / what was / to happen on the cross.

Peter: Which of the two were really praying? Who is really the sinner?

The so-called prayer of the **Pharisee** is not even really a prayer, it is an announcement of **his** virtue and a condemnation of someone who **he** despised. Have you ever heard prayers that were more like sermons and meant to address the sins of others rather than to communicate with God?

And which one of them got their prayer answered? **Both** of them. The **Tax collector** asked for forgiveness & connection with God, - and received it - **He** "went home justified" the reading says. He is like the widow in the 1st reading: God listens, and responds with blessing.

The **Pharisee** asked for nothing at all, and that's just what **he** got.

He was so full of himself that **he** believed that **he** could earn **his** own way into heaven.

He is a lot like St Paul before his conversion; before he can say that everything is a gift, to God be the glory!

Anna: Jesus turns expectations about this story / upside down - / both in his own time / & in 2016. /

It's the one / who thought **he** was so good / who is really the sinner; / the **one** who places **himself** / outside of / the grace of God / because **he** doesn't believe / **he** needs it. / And it is the **one** / who cries out / for mercy / that receives that grace, / because **he** admits / that **he** is powerless. / ~ This **reverses** the water glass image (full-TAX COLLECTOR) - (empty-PHARISEE)

Peter - that's the deep meaning of 🎵 The Lord hears the cry of the Poor.....

Anna: The **Tax collector** / was someone who reflected / what today we might call / "the other." /

In the eyes of the **Pharisee** / & many Jews, / he was definitely "not like me." /

Have you ever / looked at someone / & felt like that person / was one of "Them"? /

It's a deeply imbedded / strong / human reaction. / (like 1st graders on the playground each of the 20yrs. I was a teacher who used to complain, "she is Sally's friend, so she can't be my friend any more.")

My awareness of this / recently heightened / when I heard a commercial / in which I heard someone say / "How can she be with us if she is with them?"

Peter: This parable reminds me of something that happened to me in 2003. It was before the invasion of Iraq. I was giving a talk to a group of men in a Catholic church in Sa very Italian section of Schenectady. Sr. Anna was with me, because she had come to the Mass which preceded the talk, and the members of the Holy Name Society had invited her to come to the dinner and the talk.

My theme was about learning to curse, the way Jesus cursed. It was really about dealing with evil the way Jesus did, but my title got their attention. The preparations for war were not part of my topic, but during the question/comment session that followed, one of the men proceeded to ask me what I thought about the possibility of going to war in Iraq.

When I said that some of our own military generals were uncertain about the wisdom of such a course of action, he shot back, "Which ones! Name them!" He also kept referring to Arabs & Iraqis as "Those people, & Them," clearly seeing them as not like us. I could feel anger rising up in me, and I got quiet - when I'm really mad, I don't shout, I get quiet - and I prayed to find a way to respond that was in tune with the answer Jesus might want me to give. Finally, I said.

"Are you Italian?" [It was an Italian parish & all of them were at least half]. "So am I," I said, "on my mother's side." In fact, she was turned down for a job in Loudonville, not very far from here, because her last name was Ranalli. Do you remember when they called us **Dago & Wop & Guinea?** Do you remember when **we** were 'Them'? Be careful who **you** call 'Them.'

The other men applauded, & this experience continues to help me see the Gospel call more clearly.

Anna: The focus of this parable/is in the way Jesus/introduces it. / He addresses the story/

"to those/who were convinced/of their own righteousness/while holding everyone else/in contempt."

We would all be much better off/ if we were not so full of ourselves. / This is true/even of/our own inadequacies & sins. / Sometimes/this parable is heard/as an invitation to put ourselves down./ But that is NOT/what Jesus is saying.

How can we, today,/ be more like the empty glass/that is open to be filled/with the love & mercy of God? /

P-First of all, we can admit that sometimes we act like the **Pharisee**. Our culture almost demands that we find ways to **earn** our worthiness, even to buy our way into heaven by the good deeds we do. But when we are full of ourselves, it is inevitable that we hold others in contempt.

These "others" can be immigrants, **OR** those who are part of a different race **OR** who speak another language, **OR** who belong to another political party **OR** who have a different sexual orientation. We see this played out in the news almost every day in violent confrontations & needless violence.

Anna: Secondly, /we can follow the process /of the **Tax Collector**, /

who is really going through/the first 3 steps of AA & other 12 step programs:

1. Admitted we were powerless .../ that our lives had become unmanageable/
2. Came to believe/that a power greater than ourselves/could restore us/to sanity/
3. Made a decision/to turn our life and will over /to the care of God/as we understood God/

Even if it's **NOT** alcohol, / every one of us is powerless over something. / As one of Fr. Peter's mentors used to say, /
"We are all recovering self-a-holics." / ~ All of us / need healing / from the insanity / of our world, /
& / it is only / the grace of God / that can bring us / to sanity & sanctity. /

Peter: Finally, we need to truly understand the meaning of the command to love our neighbor as ourselves. Rabbis understand that command, which Jesus quotes from the Old Testament, as a call to love my neighbor as if I were that neighbor. I heard Eckhardt Tolle put it this way: "to love your neighbor is to see yourself in your neighbor." It's a bit like walking in someone else's shoes, as Native American wisdom puts it.

Just last week, I was in a faith sharing group with a man who is suffering from cancer. That is the reality that he is powerless to overcome.

He expressed his experience of life in words that made us laugh, & then took our breath away. First he said, "I am hearing God call me to meet new people. But do all of them have to be doctors?."

Then he gave thanks to God for being in a group "that helps me know & experience that **everyone** is a part of **me**."

Anna: We pray / that we may be given the grace / to empty our glass / when it becomes full of /
our selfish arrogance, / & / to wait in hope / for the Lord to fill our emptiness / with divine love & mercy. /
And we pray that / our families & congregations / be groups that foster / that experience. /

♪ The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Blessed be the Lord. ♪

**Ev-'ry spirit crushed, / God will save; / will be ransom / for their lives;
Will be / safe shelter for their fears, / and will hear / the cry of the poor.**

