

OCTOBER 26 2025 FATHER ERNESTO DE CICCIO

I confess that I had a bit of a hard time choosing which scripture passage to focus on today, because that second reading that we read, from Saint Paul's second letter to Timothy, is one of my favourites. Especially that line when Paul writes, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith." Second Timothy, chapter four, verse seven.

One of my favourite passages that really speaks to our Christian life—fighting that good fight, and eventually getting to the end of our race. And no matter what we've had to encounter along the way, keeping the faith. Saint Paul gives us a wonderful example of true faith.

And in the Gospel, we meet two individuals with different kinds of faith. Now, in a certain way, they were both doing something right, because they both chose to go to the temple to pray. That's good! The problem is how one of them chose to pray. Keep in mind, Jesus is addressing these words in this parable, we're told at the beginning, to "some who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous." And not just that—they were regarding others with contempt. In other words, they thought they were so much better than everybody else.

This is what you call "self-righteous." And Jesus uses the example of a Pharisee, because he got into a lot of problems with these Pharisees, since he saw them often as being self-righteous. They weren't practicing the true faith—faith that comes from the heart, faith that has a good dose of humility in it.

This Pharisee is talking to God, out loud: “I thank you that I’m not like other people. I don’t want to be like other people. I want to be better than the rest of the world.” And he refers to others as “thieves, and rogues, and adulterers.” Is all the rest of the people that bad? But that’s all he saw in others. And he even points out, “I’m better than this tax collector,” because he noticed him right there in the temple. Self-righteousness.

The tax collector knew that he was a human being—weak, broken, sinful. He didn’t even dare to raise his eyes up to God. He prays with humility, and simply says, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” He didn’t make himself out to be equal to God. He knew who he was. And he knew that he needed God’s mercy, and grace, and forgiveness.

What category do we fall into? Well, sadly, sometimes we can be like the Pharisee—a little self-righteous, thinking of ourselves as so much better than the rest of the world. Hopefully most of the time, we recognize that we’re just weak human beings, not equal to God, and not better than anybody else.

You know, in the time of Jesus, people would’ve looked at this Pharisee as a “holy person,” because he was a Pharisee. And people would’ve looked at the tax collector as a terrible sinner, because he was a tax collector. But Jesus was always able to find goodness and faith in the worst of sinners—yes, the tax collectors, the prostitutes even—because Jesus never just looked at the outside, but at what people had in their hearts.

What do we have in our hearts? Do we have the pride and self-righteousness of the Pharisee? Or do we have the humility and simple faith of the tax collector? I always caution people to be careful not to think of certain people as so “holy.” Watch out for that word. I tell people all the time—there are those who can be rather “pious.” Because they can do all sorts of devotions and spiritual practices, and they might not be holy at all! And there are others who might not be very pious at all, and who are real saints—really holy.

The Pharisee and the tax collector—different individuals, different ways of praying, different attitudes. It’s all about our relationship with God. How do we approach our God? Do we think we’re equal to him? Or, like the tax collector, do we recognize that we’re small?

Humility is something that the tax collector was able to practice—maybe one of the hardest things for any of us to learn at times. But let’s follow the good example of the tax collector, who knew simply to stand before the presence of the Lord, in humility, in simplicity, and simply asking for God’s mercy and love.