Mission In Scripture: Nurturing A Missionary Heart

October 27, 2019
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Pharisee and the tax collector are not what they first seem


In this Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus tells a parable that He specifically directs to all who are self-righteous. He introduces two men who are apparently total opposites: a Pharisee and a tax collector. The first starts his prayer by thanking God, but not for His merciful blessings. Instead, he tells God that he is grateful that he is better than other people. It is true that he fasts and tithes and in other ways seems to live a good life according to Jewish laws. However, his heart is not focused on loving and serving God, but on himself. This Pharisee looks down on the tax collector, condemning him for his sinfulness without understanding his own. He claims to be honest – and he surely does not steal from others the way the tax collector no doubt does – but he is not honest with himself. He thinks that he has somehow earned God’s rewards because of his good behavior. But he has no sense of humility before God or understanding of his true relationship with others.

In the tax collector we find a man who recognizes the truth of his own sinfulness. Here is someone despised by his fellow Jews. He collaborates with the Roman invaders and demands excessive taxes from his neighbors for his own gain. Whatever the reason, he has come to the realization of his failure to honor God and respect people. So he prays from the heart. “But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me as a sinner.’ I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:13-14). This sinner knows something the Pharisee does not. God wants to offer us His mercy. If we approach him with contrition, He will always welcome us. The Pharisee is so self-centered that he is not even aware of his faults. But when we concentrate on loving and serving God instead of ourselves, He will draw us ever closer to Himself – and to heaven.

Suggested missionary action: As this Extraordinary Mission Month October comes to an end, let us thank God for the gift of faith and do all we can to share it with others through prayer, our own example, and by supporting the Church’s missions.

For more about the Extraordinary Missionary Month and related resources, visit this website.

For resources for the celebration of World Mission Sunday, visit this website.