

October 27: Authentic Humility Serves Evangelization

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus' parable about the Pharisee and the Publican tax collector; both went up to the temple to pray. Pharisees belonged to a Jewish sect that rigidly followed the law; they were often self-righteous and critical of others. Publicans were Jews who served the Roman authorities by collecting taxes, often enriching themselves in the process; they were considered public sinners and were treated with disdain.

Recall that Jesus told this parable to some "who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else." Jesus contrasts the attitudes of the two men. The Pharisee's prayer was a self-serving attempt to tell God how righteous he was; it reeked of pride and an inflated ego. The Publican pleaded: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner"; he recognized his guilt and his sins, begging God's forgiveness. Jesus concludes his parable, saying "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Pope Francis provides us with insights on genuine humility. "If God prefers humility it is not to debase us: humility is the necessary precondition for being lifted up again by Him, so as to experience the mercy that comes to fill our emptiness. The prayer of the arrogant does not reach God's heart, but the humility of the wretched opens it up. God has a predilection for the humble and, encountering a humble heart, He opens His own fully" (6-1-16). Again, "in Mary we see that humility is not a virtue of the weak but of the strong who do not have to treat others badly to feel important" (8-13-17).

Indeed, all evangelizers need the attitude of humble servants. Humility is a clear sign of the messenger's authenticity. Humility attracts; humility evangelizes. As Pope Francis noted in his homily at the beginning of his pontificate (3-19-13): "Let us never forget that authentic power is service"!