

## God Listens to our Prayers (Oct. 24, 2010)

- God is more merciful than we are.
- We can approach God in prayer with faith & trust in his mercy

We see God portrayed in the First reading as an “equal opportunity” God, a God who does not play favorites. God listens to everyone’s prayers – regardless.

As we heard:

**“The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;  
It does not rest till it reaches its goal,  
Nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds.”**

The Psalmist puts those ideas into such memorable words:

**“The Lord hears the cry of the poor; blessed be the Lord.”**

So I ask:

“What are the poor praying for ... today?

Are they asking God for ME to do something? Like what?

As one writer says:

**“In the reign of God, if you are not poor, you better be a friend of the poor.”**

Yes, take that thought and do a bit of soul-searching as the day progresses.

We get further insight on how God answers prayers in today’s Gospel parable.

Last year we spent quite a bit of time exploring parables at our five Generation of Faith gatherings.

And, lately our Sunday Gospels have been full of parables.

With all the expertise that we have accumulated from those parables, from GOF, from classes we have taken in the past, from Bible study and from homilies, I would like us to ponder today’s Gospel parable – and, then, to extend the parable with some creative dialog with God.

I have asked our two lectors to assist.

**You** are all invited to participate by playing a new role in the parable.

Put on the mind of God so **you** can respond to the prayer of the Pharisee and the prayer of the tax collector.

In other words, how do **you** think God would respond to the prayer of the Pharisee and the prayer of the tax collector?

Consider all the things **you** have learned about God over the many years.

What is **your** image of God? How does he talk to us?

After we hear the lector read the words of the Pharisee I'm going to be asking **you** to give one example about how **you** think God would respond.

Let us now listen again to the words of the Pharisee:

[Have the person playing the Pharisee role read – very slowly and deliberately -- the Gospel 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 pay tithes on my whole income.”**

[Ask for individuals to talk into the microphone and give the words they expect God to say to the Pharisee – if there are several people maybe they could all come up to the microphone – in a line]

So, what do you think God would say to the Pharisee?

Who has a “one-liner” that you would like to share with us? – not a whole sermon, just a line or two.

[Here are some possible answers that may come up – if they don't come up from the congregation then possibly mention them at the end:]

Count to ten before you make such a rash judgment about the tax collector.

Give the other person the benefit of the doubt before criticizing them.

Consider how it is to walk in the shoes of the other person before making critical comments about them.

Don't make such knee-jerk reaction statements.

Don't stereotype all the people in a class.

Yes, count your blessings ... but remember that they came from me.

What you are doing is not enough!

Now let's listen to the words of the tax collector in the Gospel parable. The words are few so listen carefully:

[Have the person playing the tax collector role read – very slowly and deliberately -- the Gospel words:]

**“O God, be merciful to me a sinner.”**

[Again, ask for individuals to talk into the microphone and give the words they expect God to say to the tax collector]

What do **you** think God would say to the tax collector?

[Here are some possible comments – if they don’t come up from the congregation possibly mention them at the end:]

Welcome back! I’m really glad to see you again.  
 I’ve been watching you and hoped you would think of me.  
 It’s been awhile, hasn’t it?  
 I’m ready to talk – are you ready to change?  
 You are always welcome; I am always ready to listen.  
 Yes, you are forgiven. Please continue to change your ways.  
 I really like to hear from you. Talk to me again ... soon, real soon.  
 I really care for you and I listen to your every word.  
 If you want to know what I think spend some time with the Bible.  
 Peace be with you.  
 I will pour my mercy out on you each day.

Such a warm, generous and merciful God!

We need to learn to be more and more like God.

We are made in the image and likeness of God but we do not always live up to that image.

For example, I know that in my human-ness I would probably talk to the Pharisee this way:

Hey, cut some slack to that tax collector!  
 Give me a break, you pompous jerk!  
 Gripe, gripe, gripe ... I’m so tired of your griping!  
 Stop being so (damn) critical!  
 Hey, get off your high horse!

Yes, that's ME being judgmental of someone else who is judgmental.  
That's ME being critical of someone else who is critical.

Oh, yes, God is much more kind, generous and merciful than we will ever be!

And, how about you?

How do you approach God in prayer?

Like the publican or like the Pharisee?

Remember our equal opportunity God from the first reading:

**“The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;  
It does not rest till it reaches its goal,  
Nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds.”**

As we move into the Eucharistic prayers of the Mass let us humbly approach the Lord and then let us boldly ask to become more like God, day by day.