

30th Sunday per Annum - C
Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18;
II Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18;
Luke 18:9-14
Little Flower - 10/27/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Two weeks ago, we heard the story of the ten lepers. Today we hear the parable of the two men who went to the temple to pray. In each case, what is important is the contrast between the two characters in the story.

To understand the story of the ten lepers, we have to understand that because leprosy was considered highly contagious, those who became lepers were cut off from family and friends and from the community. Because family and community were so important to the Jewish people, lepers became, in effect, the living dead. Therefore, by healing them, Jesus gave them back their lives.

However, only one came back to thank Jesus—a Samaritan. The Jews of Jesus' time basically treated the Samaritans as Gentiles or non-Jews and were very hostile to them. Presumably at least some of the other nine who did not return were Jews. In other words, the non-Jew, the one they would least have expected to return, was the only one who returned to thank Jesus.

In the parable in today's Gospel, two men, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector, went to the temple to pray. In Jesus' time the Pharisees were a devout and influential group of Jews. However, note what Jesus said, "*The Pharisee... spoke this prayer to himself.*" In other words, the Pharisee whom one would expect to pray devoutly to God in effect prayed to himself because of his self-righteousness. On the other hand, tax collectors were classified as sinners. The tax collector recognized his sinfulness and asked for God's mercy.

Both the story of the ten lepers and the parable of the two men who went to the temple to pray challenge all of us who see ourselves as religious people. Are we self-righteous and judgmental toward others, or do we recognize our sinfulness and our need for God's forgiveness and mercy? Do we take all that God has given us for granted, or are we grateful for all the gifts that God has given us directly or indirectly? If we are grateful, do we express our gratitude to God not only in prayer and worship but also by sharing our gifts with others?

My brothers and sisters, you should have received in the mail your United Catholic Appeal pledge card. We ask that you return the card next weekend and place it in the collection. Bishop Coyne gave a good description of the United Catholic Appeal. He said it was like the Archdiocese's Sunday Collection.

We all know that the Church has three primary ministries: proclaiming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity. Every parish shares in these three ministries. However, so does the Archdiocese. The United Catholic Appeal helps the Archdiocese fulfill its ministry of proclaiming the Word of God by providing money to foster Catholic education and faith formation. The United Catholic Appeal helps the Archdiocese fulfill its ministry of celebrating the sacraments by providing money for education for our seminarians and deacons and retirement benefits for our priests. Finally, the United Catholic Appeal helps the Archdiocese exercise the ministry of charity by providing help and creating hope for people who are most in need. Please be as generous as possible.