

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

(Luke 18: 9-14)

(*Poem* Vol. 4. pp. 685-8; *Gospel* Vol. 8, pp. 197-201)

(Jesus is speaking to some people of Jericho, about the importance of not judging some converted sinners. He says:)

'Do not be like those whom you criticise in the secret of your hearts, because their actions do not correspond to their words. But let each good action of yours be the crowning-piece of each good word of yours. And then you will really be looked at and listened to benevolently, by the Eternal Father.

Listen to this parable, to understand which things are of value, in the eyes of God. It will teach you to rectify a bad thought, often found in many hearts. Most men are their own judges, but considering that only one man in a thousand is humble, it so happens that each man considers himself the only perfect one, whereas he finds hundreds of faults in his neighbour.

One day two men, who had gone to Jerusalem on business, went up to the Temple, as becomes every good Israelite, every time he sets foot in the Holy City. One was a Pharisee, the other a publican.

(In this parable, the words publican and tax collector are interchangeable.)

The former had come to collect the rents of some shops, and to make up accounts with his stewards who lived near the town.

The latter had come to hand in the taxes he had collected, and to invoke compassion for a widow who could not pay the taxation on a boat and nets. This was because the amount of fish caught by her oldest son was barely sufficient to feed her many children.

Before going up to the Temple, the Pharisee had called on the tenants of the shops, and after looking around and seeing that they were full of goods and buyers, he was pleased with himself. He then called the tenant and said to him. "I see that your business is thriving".

"Yes, by the grace of God. I am pleased with my work. I have been able to increase the stock of goods, and I hope to increase it further. I made improvements to the place, and next year I shall have no expenses for benches and shelves, and I will therefore have more profit".

"Well! Very well! I am glad! What is your rent for this place?"

"One hundred didrachmae a month. It is dear, but the position is a good one..."

"You are right. It is good. I therefore double the rent".

"But sir" exclaimed the shopkeeper. "If you do that, you leave me no profit!".

"What I said is right. Have I to make you rich with my property? Be quick. You either give me two thousand four hundred didrachmae at once, or I will expel you and keep the goods. The place belongs to me, and I can do what I like with it".

He did that with the first, the second and the third tenant, doubling the price to each of them, and turning a deaf ear to their appeals. And when the third tenant - who had a large family - wanted to offer resistance, he sent for the police, and had the official seals of restraint affixed to the door. And the poor tenant was driven out.

Then in his mansion, he examined the registers of his stewards. Finding faults, he punished them as sluggards, and claimed the goods they had rightfully kept for themselves. One of them had a dying son, and because of the heavy expenses he had sold part of his master's oil to buy medicines. So he had nothing to give the greedy master.

"Have mercy on me, sir. My poor son is on the point of death, and later on I will do extra work to pay you what you think is fair. But now, as you can understand, I am not in a position to do so".

"Are you not? I will show you whether you can pay me or not". He then went to the oil-mill with the poor steward, and took away even the small amount of oil the man had kept for his family, for feeding the lamp, and for watching at night at the bedside of his son.

The publican, instead, went to his superior, who on receiving the taxes he had collected, said to him: "Three hundred and seventy ases are missing. How come?"

"Well" replied the publican, "I will explain it to you. In the village there is a widow with seven children. Only the oldest is fit to work. But he cannot go far from the shore in his boat, because

his arms are too weak to handle the oars and the sail, and he cannot afford to pay an assistant. As he fishes near the shore he catches very little - hardly sufficient to feed the eight poor wretches. I did not have the heart to collect the tax".

"I see" said the superior. "But the law is law. It would be dreadful if people knew that it is compassionate. Everybody would find some reason not to pay. Let the young man change trade and sell his boat, if they can't pay".

"It is their daily bread, also for the future... and it is a souvenir of their father".

"I understand. But it is not possible to compromise".

"All right. But I can't think of eight unfortunate people being deprived of their only resource. I will pay the three hundred and seventy asses".

Then the publican and the Pharisee went up to the Temple. On passing near the treasury hall, the Pharisee ostentatiously took a bulky purse from his bosom, and emptied it - to the last coin - into the treasury. The purse contained the money taken from the shopkeepers, and the proceeds of the steward's oil that the Pharisee had immediately sold to a merchant. The publican, instead, threw in a handful of small coins, after keeping what he needed to go back home. So they both gave what they had.

Apparently the Pharisee was the more generous, because he gave the last coin he had. But one must also consider that he had more money in his mansion, and he had credits with rich money-changers.

They then went before the Lord. The Pharisee went to the very front, near the limit of the Court of the Hebrews, toward the Holy. The publican went to the back, almost under the vault opening into the Women's Court, where he remained stooped, crushed by the thought of his misery - as compared with divine Perfection. And they both prayed.

The Pharisee stood up straight - almost insolent, as if he were the landlord of the place, condescending to do homage to a visitor. He said: "Here I am, I have come to venerate You in the House that is our glory. I have come, although I feel that You are in me, because I am a just man. I know how to behave, to be so. However, although I am aware that it is only through my own merit that I am such, I thank You, as prescribed by the law, for what I am. I am not greedy, unjust, adulterous, or a sinner like that publican who threw a handful of small coins into the Treasury at the same time as I did. As for me - as You saw - I gave You all I had with me. That greedy fellow, instead, divided his money into two parts and gave You the smaller one. He will certainly keep the other part for revelries and women. But I am pure. I will not be polluted. I am pure and just, I fast twice a week, and I pay the tithes of what I possess. Yes, I am pure, just and blessed, because I am holy. Bear that in mind, o Lord".

The publican remained in his remote corner, without daring to raise his eyes towards the precious doors of the Temple. Striking his chest, he prayed, saying: "Lord, I am not worthy to be here. But You are just and holy, and You still allow me to stay here, because You know that man is a sinner, and if he does not come to You he becomes a demon. Oh! my Lord! I would like to honour You day and night, but for many hours I am the slave of my work. It is an unpleasant work, that disheartens me, because it is the cause of grief to the poorest of my neighbours. But I must obey my superiors, because it is my daily bread. Grant me, o my God, to be able to lessen my duty towards my superiors, with charity towards my poor brothers, so that I may not be condemned because of my work. Every work is holy, if performed with charity. Let Your charity be always present to my heart, so that I - miserable as I am - may bear with my subjects as You bear with me, a big sinner. I would have liked to honour You more, Lord. You know. But I thought that to take some of the money destined to the Temple, was better than putting it in the Treasury and causing eight poor innocent people to weep desolately. But if I made a mistake, let me understand that, o Lord. I will give You the last farthing, and I will go back to my village on foot, begging for a piece of bread. Let me understand Your justice. Have mercy on me, o Lord, because I am a big sinner".'

And Jesus says: 'That is the parable. I solemnly tell you, that the Pharisee left the Temple with a fresh sin, added to those he had already committed.

The publican came away justified, and the blessing of God followed him to his house, and remained in it, because he was humble and merciful, and his actions were even holier than his words. The Pharisee, instead, was good only in words and exteriorly, whilst internally he

was - and acted - as a demon, because of the pride and hardness of his heart. And God therefore detested him.

He who exalts himself, sooner or later, will be humbled. If not in this, then in the future life. And he who humbles himself will be exalted - particularly in Heaven, where the actions of men are seen in their true reality...'