

27. October 2019

“To remain in humility”

Lk 18, 9-14

He spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else, 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like everyone else, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get." The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." This man, I tell you, went home again justified; the other did not. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.'

This passage of Scripture is always a warning to us against any form of self-righteousness. This is particularly bad when it is reflected in religious life and even becomes an attitude towards God. Any form of self-exaggeration and self-overestimation is an outflow of human, and at worst satanic arrogance, and closes to God! This also influences our attitude to other people.

None of this was visible to the tax collector. His position among the people already made him very unpopular; he was obviously aware of his sins and approached the Lord in humility.

And again the Lord turns on his head the order in which we human beings are often trapped and by which we are also deceived: the humble was exalted, the pride went out empty!

The Lord then even makes a generally valid rule out of it: *"For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up."*

This is like a key to spiritual life, supported by many other passages of the Scriptures. We should not be proud of our actual or supposed natural virtues, and certainly not of our spiritual gifts. Everything is the gift of God and entrusted to us, that we may use it for the glorification of God and for the spread of his kingdom.

A basic attitude of receiving is necessary, which first of all clearly shows that we are creatures. In fact, through the many limitations of our lives, the Lord makes it clear to us how much man is dependent on God.

Therefore, it is blind to live in a supposed own greatness or even to look at it as a goal of our existence. The very fact of our mortality, the vulnerability to disease, our helplessness regarding the strong forces of nature is a constant lesson in not building security on ephemeral things, but seeking a true hold that cannot come from myself.

Seeking the safety in other people is also an illusion because of the same weakness to which they are subject. If we become aware of this and understand such knowledge as an invitation from the Lord to seek our existential security only in Him, a good step has already been taken. Then we begin thankfully looking away from us towards God. True gratitude is a good way to the virtue of humility.

If we have accepted our creatural limitation the way is easier to accept all the spiritual gifts in their beauty, but also in their limitations as a gift from God. They no longer serve to increase our value before us and before people it means not to consider themselves to be great.

We must remain aware that man's primal temptation is to want to be like God and this temptations approaches to him again and again in various forms. Basically, this means wanting to be great out of himself, and to succumb not seldom in a very fine form to the temptation of Lucifer to claim for himself and for his own greatness what the Lord has given.

Thus the school of humility is not only the entry into the reality of being, but also a salutary formation never forget that we receive from God, we are his creation, his children. We are called to the service of God to glorify and witness him through our lives. His honor is our joy.

In this way, the true greatness that man seeks arises. If we do not build ourselves up before God in some form of selfishness, we will share in the greatness of the Lord and thus find our deepest identity. God Himself will then honor us and that is more than enough!