



Luke 18:10-14

The Lord said this parable, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Resurrectional Apolytikon 4th Tone

When the women Disciples of the Lord had learned from the Angel the joyful message of the Resurrection and had rejected the ancestral decision, they cried aloud to the Apostles triumphantly: Death has been despoiled, Christ God has risen, granting His great mercy to the world.

Kontakion Fourth Tone

Let us flee from the boasting of the Pharisee and learn through our own sighs of sorrow the humility of the Publican. Let us cry out to the Savior, "Have mercy on us, for through You alone are we reconciled."

Discussion

The Pharisees were an ancient and outstanding sect among the Jews known for their diligent observance of the outward matters of the Law. Although, according to the word of our Lord, they "did all their works to be seen of men" (Matt. 23:5), and were hypocrites (ibid. 23: 13, 14, 15, etc.), because of the apparent holiness of their lives they were thought by all to be righteous, and separate from others, which is what the name Pharisee means. On the other hand, Publicans, collectors of the royal taxes, committed many injustices and extortions for filthy lucre's sake, and all held them to be sinners and unjust. It was therefore according to common opinion that the Lord Jesus in His parable signified a

virtuous person by a Pharisee, and a sinner by a Publican, to teach His disciples the harm of pride and the profit of humble-mindedness.

Since the chief weapon for virtue is humility, and the greatest hindrance to it is pride, the divine Fathers have set these three weeks before the Forty-day Fast as a preparation for the spiritual struggles of virtue. This present week they have called Harbinger, since it declares that the Fast is approaching; and they set humility as the foundation for all our spiritual labors by appointing that the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee be read today, even before the Fast begins, to teach, through the vaunting of the Pharisee, that the foul smoke of self-esteem and the stench of boasting drives away the grace of the Spirit, strips man of all his virtue, and casts him into the pits of Hades; and, through the repentance and contrite prayer of the Publican, that humility confers upon the sinner forgiveness of all his wicked deeds and raises him up to the greatest heights.

The hard truth is that we will never grow in Christ unless we intentionally take steps that help us grow in humility, that help us embrace the truth about where we stand before the Lord.

To see that truth does not mean having ideas about ourselves or about God. Instead, it means gaining the spiritual health to become more fully the unique persons He created us to be in His image and likeness.

Repentance: remember Zacchaeus. Christ knew he had made up his mind to repent. The Canaanite woman was persistent, humbling herself for her daughter's sake.

Jesus Christ shared the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee with us to warn us of the great spiritual danger of arrogant self-confidence in our own righteousness, coupled with contempt for those whom we consider to be beneath us.

This disease of the soul first manifests itself as absolute confidence and trust in the rightness of our own point of view and judgement; it presupposes our personal superiority over others.

A truly Christian heart seeks to do what is just and right as a simple and natural expression of our responsibility as persons.

St. Basil: "Even if we were somehow able to do absolutely everything that is required of us, we would still have to conclude that we are unworthy servants of the Lord. And this is because after having done all this, we will only have fulfilled our basic duty and obligation and nothing more."