

**TODAY WE BEGIN USING A BOOK THAT CARRIES US THROUGH TO HOLY SATURDAY, THE LENTEN TRIODION. IN IT ARE THE HYMNS FOR EACH DAY OF GREAT LENT. WE BEGIN USING THIS BOOK ALWAYS ON THE SUNDAY WHEN JESUS TELLS US THE PARABLE OF THE TAX COLLECTOR AND THE PHARISEE. WHY DOES HE TELL THIS PARABLE? SAINT LUKE WRITES “JESUS ALSO TOLD THIS PARABLE TO SOME WHO TRUSTED IN THEMSELVES THAT THEY WERE RIGHTEOUS AND DESPISED OTHERS.” EVEN BEFORE JESUS TELLS THE STORY, WE ARE GIVEN A FLASHING RED LIGHT TO WARN US ABOUT THINKING WE ARE RIGHTEOUS OR ABOUT DESPISING ANY ONE BECAUSE OF THEIR SINS.**

**THE STORY IS SIMPLE, THERE ARE ONLY TWO PEOPLE, THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR. AND THEY ARE DOING WHAT WE ALL ARE CALLED TO DO: PRAY TO GOD. NOW THE PHARISEE IS SOMEONE WHO KEPT STRICTLY THE LAW GIVEN BY THE LORD TO MOSES: TITHING ON MINT, DILL, AND CUMIN, FASTING TWICE A WEEK, KEEPING THE SABBATH DAY FREE FROM WORK.**

**THE PHARISEE TELLS THE LORD, AS THOUGH THE LORD NEEDS TO BE TOLD, THAT HE (THE PHARISEE) DOES ALL THAT IS COMMANDED OF HIM: HE FASTS TWICE A WEEK, HE GIVES TITHES ON ALL THAT HE HAS. THE PHARISEE IS NOT LYING, HE IS SPEAKING THE TRUTH. HE IS NOT CONDEMNED FOR GIVING THANKS. “FOR WE *MUST* GIVE THANKS TO GOD WHEN WE ARE WORTHY TO DO SOMETHING GOOD, AS GOD IS THEN WORKING IN US AND HELPING US... THE PHARISEE WAS CONDEMNED BECAUSE HE SAID ‘I AM NOT LIKE THIS TAX-COLLECTOR.’ IT WAS THEN THAT HE MADE A JUDGEMENT. HE CONDEMNED A PERSON, THE TAX COLLECTOR’S WHOLE SOUL AND LIFE. AND FOR THIS REASON, THE PHARISEE WHO LIFTED HIMSELF UP ABOVE OTHERS, LEFT THE TEMPLE NOT JUSTIFIED BEFORE THE LORD, BUT HAD HEAPED CONDEMNATION ON HIMSELF FOR TAKING OVER THE LORD’S ROLE AS JUDGE OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD. (ST. DOROTHEOS OF GAZA)**

**AFTER THE PHARISEE, JESUS SPEAKS OF THE TAX-COLLECTOR. IN JESUS’S TIME TO BE A TAX COLLECTOR WAS NOT A PROFESSION THAT WOULD WIN YOU FRIENDS AMONG YOUR COUNTRYMEN.**

**THE TAX COLLECTOR WAS COLLECTING FROM HIS FELLOW JEWS NOT FOR THEIR BENEFIT BUT FOR THE ROMAN EMPIRE THAT WAS OCCUPYING THE LAND. A TAX COLLECTOR WOULD HAVE BEEN AN OUTCAST. THINK OF ZACCHAEUS WHO WAS A TAX COLLECTOR AND HOW PEOPLE MURMURED WHEN JESUS SAID HE WOULD STAY AT HIS HOUSE. THE TAX COLLECTOR COMES INTO THE TEMPLE AWARE OF HIS SINS. HE DOES NOT DESPAIR BECAUSE OF THEM, HE DOESN'T GIVE UP. HE MAKES NO PRETENSE THAT HE IS RIGHTEOUS OR HOLY. SO, STANDING AFAR OFF, IN THE BACK, HE BEATS HIS BREAST AND SAYS THE SIMPLE PRAYER, "GOD, BE MERCIFUL TO ME, THE SINNER!" SUCH A BEAUTIFUL PRAYER! HE ASKS GOD TO BE WHO HE IS, BE MERCIFUL, TO HIM, NOT "A" SINNER BUT "THE" SINNER, THE ONLY ONE. THE TAX COLLECTOR ISN'T LOOKING AROUND TO SEE WHO ELSE IS PRAYING AND COMPARING HIS SINS TO THEIRS. HE NEVER EVEN RAISES HIS EYES TO HEAVEN LET ALONE LOOK TO SEE WHO ELSE IS IN THE TEMPLE. HE SEES HIMSELF AS THE ONLY SINNER IN THE WORLD. AND BECAUSE OF SUCH NON-JUDGEMENT OF OTHERS, HE LEAVES THE TEMPLE JUSTIFIED. THIS SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE OF NON-JUDGEMENT IS NECESSARY FOR US IN LIFE.**

**WITHOUT IT WE WALK THE UNRIGHTEOUS PATH OF THE PHARISEE. AND WHAT KEEPS US FROM JUDGING OTHER IS LOOKING NOT TO THE RIGHT OR THE LEFT OR IN FRONT OR BEHIND AT OUR NEIGHBORS BUT TURNING OUR GAZE INWARD TO SEE OUR SINS. NOT COMPARING THEM WITH ANYONE ELSE'S. AND NOT JUDGING ANYONE ELSE FOR THEIR SINS. JUDGEMENT ONLY LEADS TO OUR OWN CONDEMNATION.**

**JESUS SAYS, "EVERYONE WHO EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLLED, AND HE WHO HUMBLLES HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTED." LENT IS A SHORT TIME AWAY. WE ORTHODOX HAVE RULES ABOUT FASTING, PRAYER, AND ALMSGIVING DURING THIS TIME. LET'S NOT BOAST ABOUT HOW WELL WE KEEP THE RULES OR KEEP OUR EYES ON SOMEONE ELSE'S PLATE OF FOOD AND JUDGE THEIR FASTING. LET US LOOK INWARD AT OUR SINS, SPEAK TO THE LORD WITH HUMILITY, CALL OURSELVES "THE SINNER" AND ASK THE LORD TO BE WHAT AND WHO HE IS, THE ALL-MERCIFUL ONE, WHO COMES TO GIVE LIFE TO "THE SINNER," POURING OUT HIS ABUNDANT MERCIES, HIS VERY SELF, UPON US. "LORD JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME, THE SINNER."**