

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE 30th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C)
23rd OCTOBER 2016

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This vitally important principle underlines Jesus’ teaching on prayer.

Last week he was encouraging us to persevere and never lose heart when prayer is difficult.

This was helpful when a Year 4 girl at school asked, “Do you pray in half-term?”

I was able to reply confidently, “Yes, continually, even during half-term.”

This week Jesus tells a parable to help us to understand why God does not accept all prayer and, therefore, why some prayer is not answered.

The Pharisee and the Tax-Collector, pray in totally different ways.

The Pharisee is the one who exalts himself.

His prayer is no more than a list of all that makes him proud of himself.

He prays not to God but to himself.

He tells God how good he is but God knows him better than he knows himself; his prayer is unnecessary.

By exalting himself he thinks he has achieved all this by his own efforts.

He thanks God for his being good; no mention of God making him good or helping him to be good.

This is pride in himself, not thanks to God.

It is good to thank God in prayer so long as we thank God for all he has done for us and avoid boasting about our own achievements.

Self-exaltation makes prayer unacceptable because it is motivated by pride and totally self-centred.

Such prayer is not answered.

The Pharisee was also wrong to use his prayer to criticise the tax-collector.

God expects our prayer to be motivated by love and mercy.

St. Teresa of Avila said that we can never be sure that we love God but we do know when we are loving people, and "I cannot doubt (God) will repay our love for others by increasing in a thousand different ways that love which we have for him."

Prayer is the means of developing that love.

Today is World Mission Sunday.

Our bishops are asking us to pray for our Christian sisters and brothers who are suffering in other parts of the world, especially the people of Rwanda in Africa who are still traumatised by genocide and civil war.

Such prayer of intercession is an expression of our love for God and his people.

God answered the tax-Collector's prayer because he humbled himself.

He admitted his faults and his need for God's mercy and so allowed God to restore a right relationship with him.

This prayer of humility does not mean living in guilt; it enables God to take away our guilt and change us from being sick sinners to being "happy sinners" (Tauler) because we are penitent

The tax-collector said everything necessary in one sentence.

As St. Benedict told his monks: "God regards our purity of heart and tears of regret, not our many words "(Rule 20)

Our Collect today prays for such purity of heart - Make us love what you command so that we may obtain what you promise.

Saint Paul in our second reading show this total commitment to the will of God and his complete assurance that God would answer his prayer: "The Lord will rescue me from all evil attempts on me, and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever."

It's all God and no Paul.

So, when we pray let's humble ourselves and let God do the exalting.

Rev Geoffrey Carey