

## **HOMILY for 30<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C**

This Sunday's Readings talk about prayer & its proper posture. Reflecting on it, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

Three preachers sat discussing the best positions for prayer while a telephone repairperson worked nearby. "Kneeling is definitely best," claimed one.

"No," another contended. "I concentrate better while standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven."

"You're both wrong," the third insisted. "The most effective prayer position is lying humbly, face down on the floor."

The repairperson could contain himself no longer. "Hey, fellas," he interrupted. "The best praying I ever did was hanging upside down from a telephone pole."

Anyhow, I do not know if you have ever wondered why each religion has its own praying posture. The Jews would stand by the Wailing Wall & bobble back & forth as they recite the Torah. The Muslims would sit looking East-ward & bow forward to kiss the ground when praying. They also hold up their hands & cover their face to show what a devout Muslim they are. The Buddhists would squat & clasp their hands together while bowing their heads lightly to show their serious praying posture. Of course, we Catholics would kneel, genuflect, or bow to let the world know our reverence to God & proper praying posture.

The reason I want to call our attention to those various praying postures of major religions is to let us know the exterior distinction & uniqueness of each religion in praying. Those praying postures might be the main focus for the believers. But, it's definitely not for God! For God has always been interested in one's heart & the way that a believer truly lives out one's faith every day. That is why Jesus constantly corrected the Scribes & Pharisees for focusing their faith only on the appearance while letting their hearts wander far away from God. He challenged them to have a real spiritual conversion & begin to change their lives from inside out.

In case we have any doubt about that message, Jesus reminds us of it in this Sunday's Gospel as following: "...Two men went up the Temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee with head unbowed prayed in this fashion: 'I give you thanks, O God, that I am not like the rest of the world – grasping, crooked, adulterous – or even like that tax collector. I fast twice a week. I pay tithes on all I possess.' The other man, however, kept his distance, not even daring to raise his eyes to Heaven. All he did was beat his breast & say, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.' Believe me, this man went home from the Temple justified but the other did not."

Evidently Jesus was put off by the Pharisee's boastful prayer & his proud posture. The Pharisee spent his lengthy prayer telling God how wonderful he is while showing how much he despised the sinful world. The Pharisee might have assumed that the Lord would bend the divine ears to his prayer & grant it without any hesitation. But, the Lord did not. Meanwhile, Jesus seemed to sympathize to the repentant tax collector's heartfelt prayer & his humble posture. The tax collector was so sorrowful about his sinful past that he kept a distance from God & did not dare to look up to Heaven. In the end, Jesus gave His verdict on those two types of prayer & said that the Lord would listen to the repentant tax collector's prayer while ignoring the boastful Pharisee's.

Now we know what prayer form & proper posture that the Lord would bend His ears & grant its request. In case we're still unclear about that, this Sunday's First Reading tells us about various types of favorable prayers as following, "...Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet He [the Lord] hears the cry of the oppressed. He is not deaf to the wail of the orphans, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint. He who serves the Lord willingly is heard; his petition reaches the Heavens. The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal." So, the Book of Sirach confirms Jesus' verdict on accepting the prayers of the lowly & the humble before the ones of the powerful & the proud. It goes further by letting us know that God often leans His ears toward the weak, the oppressed, the orphans, the widow, & the outcast. God also rewards the faithful & listens to their prayers easily. That is why we need to live up to the Lord's Commandments of love if we want Him to answer our prayers without delay. We also need to follow God's will & support the weak, the oppressed, the orphans, the widow, & the outcast instead of the powerful, the rich, & the elites.

Hopefully the insights I have just shared about the favorable prayers & the proper posture will help us review our own prayers & adjust them accordingly to get the best results. Otherwise, we would keep on doing our current ineffective way of praying & get nowhere with it. Indeed, Jesus advises us to have a repentant spirit & humble posture of the tax collector if we would like the Lord to listen to our prayers & answer them. When we do not have a repentant spirit & ask the Lord to look on our petitions with mercy, we might think that we have lived up to God's Commandments & deserved all of God's blessings. But, the truth is that we have not done it & have failed to love God & neighbors as a Christian. In fact, our current world should have a repentant spirit of the tax collector & ask the Lord to judge it mercifully now as well as on the Last Day because it has not loved God with all of its being & has not treated its neighbors as itself. Lastly, when we do not have a humble posture of the tax collector & put the Lord high above us, we would dare to act like a judge & then do whatever we want. That is the proud posture of our current world & its leaders. That is why the Lord seems to ignore the prayers of our time & let our world be in the constant state of hate & violence. We must change our current way of praying & our posture if we would want the Lord to hear our prayers.

My dear brothers & sisters, would you like the Lord to hear your prayers & grant your requests? If we do, then we must adopt the way of praying & posture of the repentant tax collector & avoid the one of the boastful Pharisee. Otherwise, the Lord would not listen to our prayers & grant our requests as we wish.