

Deserving God
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle C

Do we deserve God? That is today's question. We have the familiar story of the proud Pharisee and the humble tax collector. The Pharisee, a respected, religious man, a man well versed in scripture and what God requires of us. He is certain that he has done all that God requires and tells God so as he stands proudly in the Temple.

The tax collector is not respected, he is despised. He is despised because he works for the hated and pagan Roman government helping it to squeeze whatever money it can from the poor people of Palestine. Being a Jew and doing this also makes him a traitor to his people.

God knows these two men; He knows all of us more intimately than we know ourselves and He knows what they are, and more importantly, **who** they are. God knows the secrets of each person's heart. Nothing can hide the true person from God.

The tax collector knows that he is a sinner. He is **so** aware of his sin that he does not even look up at God. Instead of telling God what he has done for Him, he simply asks God to be merciful to him, for he needs God's mercy.

We are all in need of God's mercy for we are all flawed, stained individuals. If we were not, we would not need to be here today, Christ would not have to have endured His Passion and there would be no need for the Church or the Sacraments. All of these were created to help us close the gap that exists between God and ourselves.

Now the fact of the matter is, that we all create gaps between us and God through the sins that we commit each day. All of us, Pope Francis, the Bishop, the Fathers here and, as I know too well, at least one of the deacons is a sinner. If we are living and breathing then we are a sinner.

There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. Many people today think that if they live a good life, they can find salvation. This

sounds somewhat like a 4th century heresy called Pelagianism. This heresy held that God's grace was not needed for salvation, human will was sufficient to live a sinless life. By doing so it removed the need for Christ to be the vehicle of salvation that He is. By our own efforts we could deserve God.

As I look at the world today it seems to me that this heresy is back with us. How many people have you heard say, "I don't need Church, I am spiritual." "When I am by the ocean or in the mountains, I feel close to God, that is my church" and so on. I can tell you from personal experience that while we can feel close to God in nature that He created; we cannot find salvation there.

Nothing that we can do on our own will make us deserve God. Jesus, is the only path to salvation. By recognizing our sins and turning to Him for forgiveness through the Sacraments of the Church will gain us salvation.

The Psalm says that "the Lord hears the cry of the poor." Certainly, He hears the cry of those who are materially poor but there is another poverty and that is poverty of the spirit. If we come before God recognizing that nothing, we can do can make us worthy of God's love, we will become closer to the person that God wants us to be. Turn to God, **He will not** turn from you.