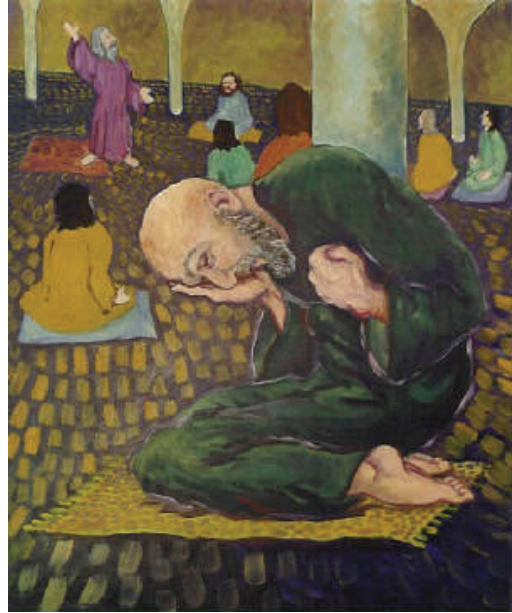


CARITAS FELLOWSHIP
PARABLES #10, *THE PHARISEE & THE PUBLICAN*
3 DECEMBER 2009

LUKE 18.9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:
10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed [1] thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 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!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."



ANONYMOUS BLOG COMMENTER

This parable was the subject of the most memorable homily I've heard in my life. Sometime 35-40 years ago. I was young then.

It was a single-sentence homily.

After pausing for a while upon finishing the proclamation of the reading, the priest said something very close to this: "I wonder how many of us are thanking God we are not like that Pharisee." Then he paused again for some time to let that sink in, before proceeding with the rest of the Mass.

FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN

I once heard an over-enthusiastic retreat leader proclaim, "Repentance means we turn around 360 degrees!" Of course, in some cases, we do; then we repent again. Even the publican in the temple, heartfelt as his repentance was, may not have walked out the door and into a pristine life. He may have only partly understood the changes God was requiring of him; he may have even failed, initially, at those he did attempt.

The shocking news of the Gospel is that we can always be forgiven. God desires "I'm sorry" more than "I did it." We cart the broken heap of self into the repair shop and beg for mercy and strength, knowing this is what He loves. "A broken and a contrite heart...you will not despise." (Ps 51:17)

Broken and contrite hearts have been showing up in odd places lately, not necessarily where the faith journey is complete. Author and Salon digazine columnist Anne Lamott holds the usual raft of liberal opinions, yet she's vocally sold out to Jesus, grateful to the church that welcomed her when she was unwed, pregnant, and recovering from substance abuse. Her faith mystifies her family, friends and even herself. She writes of looking at an image of Christ crucified: "I believe in it, and it's so nuts. How did some fabulously cerebral and black-humored cynic like myself come...to believe as much as I believe in gravity or the size of space that Jesus paid a debt he didn't owe because we had a debt we couldn't pay? @

Likewise, hot novelist Rick Moody ("The Ice Storm") wrote an essay explaining "Why I Pray" for Esquire magazine. Once a "militant atheist" who took drugs and "slept with anybody with a pulse," his chaotic life landed him in a mental hospital where he came to himself. "I wept. And then I prayed." Now involved with a church prayer group, he continues praying, though sometimes mumbling: "I have no idea who you

are." He has glimpsed the light but admittedly does not yet grasp it, though he knows well his own brokenness. He ends his essay with "The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not understood it."

"I'm sorry." It's a good place for understanding to start.

ST. GREGORY PALAMAS

As he stood he bowed down, and his bearing was not only that of a lowly servant, but also of a condemned man. It also proclaims a soul delivered from sin. Although still far from God, without the boldness towards Him that comes from good works, it hopes to draw near to him because it has already renounced evil and is intent on good. 'Standing afar off the publican would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven', showing his self-condemnation and self-reproach by his manner and appearance. He saw himself as unworthy either of heaven or of the earthly Temple, so he stood on the threshold of the Temple, not daring even to turn his gaze towards heaven, still less towards the God of heaven. In his intense contrition he smote upon his breast to show he was worthy of punishment. He sighed in deepest mourning, bowing his head like a condemned man, calling himself a sinner and begging with faith for forgiveness, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'. For he believed Him Who said, 'Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you' (Zech. 1:3), and the Prophet who bore witness, 'I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my heart' (cf. Ps. 32:5).