Counsels from St. Paisios – Judging Others

The Pharisee and the Publican - Luke 18:9–14

*"Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

# Discussion

1. Why was the Publican justified when the Pharisee was not?

**Teacher’s Notes:**

Beginning:

* "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others

The Pharisee’s prayer:

* 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

The Publican’s prayer:

* 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

End:

* I tell you, this man (the tax collector) went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

The theme of this parable is repentance. Repentance is the door through which we enter Lent, the starting-point of the journey to Pascha. To repent signifies far more than self-pity or futile regret over things done in the past. The Greek term metanoia means “change of mind.” To repent is to be renewed, to be transformed in our inward viewpoint, to attain a fresh way of looking at our relationship with God and with others. The fault of the Pharisee is that he has no desire to change his outlook; he is complacent, self-satisfied, and so he allows no place for God to act within him. The Gospel depicts him as a man that is pleased only with himself who thinks that he has complied with all of the requirements of religion. But in his pride, he has falsified the meaning of true religion and faith. He has reduced these to external observations, measuring his piety by the amount of money he gives.

The Publican, on the other hand, truly longs for a “change of mind.” He humbles himself, and his humility justifies him before God. He becomes, in the words of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3), “poor in spirit.” He acknowledges that he is a sinner, and he knows that salvation is only found in the mercy of God. Here we find an example of true humility, an essential aspect of repentance. A “change of mind” and the transformation of our lives can only happen when we humble ourselves before God, acknowledge our willingness to turn from sin, and receive His grace into our lives.

Our preparation for Lent thus begins with a prayer for humility, the beginning of true repentance. Through repentance, we can find and return to the true order of things, a restoration of our spiritual vision that will guide us in a very difficult and challenging world. By entering Great Lent in humility and repentance, we can attain deeper communion with God as we receive His forgiveness and He blesses by guiding us to greater spiritual heights.

So, why should we not judge others? Particularly in the context of “judging righteously,” that is, how do I balance “not judging others,” and maintaining a godly life?

It lies in our focus, is our focus inwards? Is it aimed at cultivating my relationship with God? In that way, am I humbling myself? Am I taking inventory of my own soul to become “poor in spirit?” Or is my focus aimed at cutting down others? In that way, exalting myself, either by elevating myself over others or lowering others that I might “tower over them?”

1. Who knows the Prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian?

**Teacher’s Notes:**

We see, this prayer is prescribed as a daily part of our Lenten prayer rule. An entire third of this prayer is dedicated to “not judging my brothers,” but looking inward. So, we can see the importance our faith places on not judging others, on how important it is to self-evaluate, as we prepare for Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, where we are united to Christ.

# Video Translation

St. Paisios the Athonite:

"You must also view all the others as saints. And to see only yourself as a sinner, the smallest among all, even if other people may be sinners.

We have no right to see them as sinners. We have no right to judge them! We have no right to speak against a sinner.

We have to see only ourselves as sinners, and the smallest among all!

...

Let our soul always thirst for the knowledge of the truth,

let it thirst for the forgiveness of sins,

let it thirst for the peace of consciousness,

Let it thirst for the heavenly joy!

The most beautiful thirst is the one for the union with Jesus Christ!

Let it thirst for the Holy Communion!

Let it thirst for the acquisition of virtues!

Let it thirst for entering as quickly as possible into the Kingdom of Heaven, to free itself as soon as possible from the vanity of this world, to free itself from pain, from sorrow, from torment, from the wickedness which reigns in the hearts of people!

For becoming free!

For freeing ourselves from passions!

And finally, let our soul thirst for the eternal joy!

Let it thirst for the union with God, so that we may live forever with the saints! Because... how long will be our life here on earth?"

# Counsels from Saint Paisios

1. **When can we be of help to others?**

If you want to help the Church, it is better to try to correct yourself, rather than be looking to correct others. If you manage to correct yourself, one small part of the Church is immediately corrected. Naturally, if everyone did the same, the body of the Church would be in good health. But, today, people concern themselves with anything but themselves. You see, judging others is easy, whereas working on yourself takes effort.

If we work to correct ourselves and look more intently towards our “inner” activity rather than our external, giving precedence to divine help, we can in turn be of greater and more positive help to others. We will also achieve an inner serenity that will quietly help the souls of the people we encounter because spiritual serenity reflects the virtue of the soul and transforms souls.

When someone applies himself to external activity before having polished his spiritual inner state, he may struggle spiritually, but he will be fraught with worry, anxiety, lack of confidence in God and frequent loss of serenity. If he does not improve himself, he cannot say that his interest for the common good is pure. When he is liberated from the old self and all things worldly, then he will receive divine Grace and be not only at peace with himself, but also able to bring peace to everyone else. But if he has not received the Grace of God, then he can neither govern himself nor help others in order to bring about a divine effect. He must first be immersed in divine Grace and then utilize his resulting sanctified powers for the salvation of others.

**Teachers Note:**

Often times, by judging others, it gives us an opportunity to “look outwards.” That is, it’s easier to ignore my problems by criticizing how much worse others might be. If we do that, are we really tending to our own wounds or just mocking others for theirs?

Regarding this topic Elder Paisios states, “One who justifies himself with excuses makes no progress in the spiritual life, nor can he find any inner peace.”

While speaking with a group of nuns, he expounded this saying:

I must understand that when I try to justify myself with excuses, I’m in a wrong state of mind. I cut off my communication with God and am deprived of divine Grace, because divine Grace does not come to one who is in a wrong state. The moment a person justifies the unjustifiable, he is separated from God…There is no stronger barrier to the Grace of God than excuses!

1. **BUT WHAT IF WE *KNOW* THAT SOMEBODY ELSE IS WRONG?**

*There are times we see others performing actions that we know are wrong. What should we do then? The Elder provides a couple of examples,*

He who does his spiritual work correctly finds excuses for everyone else in order to justify their shortcomings, but never justifies himself, even when he is in the right…

For example, he sees someone stealing and thinks to himself, “If I had not been helped by God, I would now be stealing more than he is” … Or, if he sees a certain shortcoming in another person, be it serious or trivial, he will excuse him with good and positive thoughts. He thinks of his own many shortcomings…

1. **Sometimes I'm late to understand.**

See that you understand the quickness of your fall and ask for forgiveness from the sister which you condemned by God, because this becomes an obstacle to prayer. With judgmentalism the Grace of God automatically leaves and immediately generates coldness in your communication with God. How can you pray after? Your heart becomes ice, marble. Judgmentalism and condemnation are the greatest sins and remove the Grace of God more than any other sin. As Saint John Klimakos wrote: "As water extinguishes the fire, so does judgmentalism extinguish the Grace of God."

1. **Elder, I'm very sleepy during the morning Service.**

Did you perhaps condemn a sister? You see external things and judge, which is why you are sleepy after the Service. From the moment you judge someone and do not look at things spiritually, dozens of spirits gather and we are weakened. And when we are weakened, we are sleepy or have insomnia.

1. **Elder, I often fall into gluttony.**

Look, what you need to be very careful about now is judgmentalism. If you do not cut off judgmentalism, you will not be able to be freed of gluttony. The person who judges, because they eliminate the Grace of God, remains hopeless and cannot cut off their flaws. And if they can't figure out their flaws and be humbled, they will constantly fall. But if they understand it and ask for God's help, then the Grace of God returns.

1. **Elder Paisios and the four stages of maturity in receiving injustice.**

For example, let’s say somebody hurls an insult at you.

Stage 1 – We hurl an insult back and we feel upset or perhaps we believe we have a “righteous” anger.

Stage 2 – We feel anger arising inside of us; we are hurt, but we hold our tongue and walk away.

Stage 3 – The insult does not upset us.

Stage 4 – Elated joyfulness at suffering injustice. This is what the apostles experienced when they were persecuted and they rejoiced, praising God that they were found worthy to suffer for Him. (Acts 5:41)

When you accept an injustice and are prepared to justify your neighbor, you accept Christ himself into your heart, Who was often wronged and maligned. It is then that Christ cannot be evicted from your heart and fills you with peace and gladness.

1. **St. Paisios and the Alcoholic Monk**

Once on Mount Athos there was a monk who lived in Karyes. He drank and got drunk every day and was the cause of scandal to the pilgrims. Eventually he died and this relieved some of the faithful who went on to tell Elder Paisios that they were delighted that this huge problem was finally solved. Father Paisios answered them that he knew about the death of the monk, after seeing the entire battalion of angels who came to collect his soul. The pilgrims were amazed and some protested and tried to explain to the Elder, of whom they were talking about, thinking that the Elder did not understand. Elder Paisios explained to them: "This particular monk was born in Asia Minor, shortly before the destruction by the Turks when they gathered all the boys. So as not to take him from their parents, they would take him with them to the reaping, and so he wouldn't cry, they just put raki\* into his milk in order for him to sleep. Therefore, he grew up as an alcoholic. There he found an elder and said to him that he was an alcoholic. The elder told him to do prostrations and prayers every night and beg the Panagia to help him to reduce by one the glasses he drank. After a year he managed with struggle and repentance to make the 20 glasses he drank into 19 glasses. The struggle continued over the years and he reached 2-3 glasses, with which he would still get drunk." The world for years saw an alcoholic monk who scandalized the pilgrims, but God saw a fighter who fought a long struggle to reduce his passion. Without knowing what each one is trying to do what he wants to do, what right do we have to judge his effort?

# Similar Teachings from other Saints and Church Fathers

Oh, my dear friends, all the people around you, in your home and outside it as well, need you. There is a terrible curse in our life, which afflicts many people, the curse of loneliness. … Many people live shut away in their loneliness, and often there is no to show them a little love. Everyone around us, poor and rich, small and great, needs us.Let our life be characterized by loving care, tenderness and compassion. Let us live close to others, and for others. As one of the ascetics says, ‘our foundation is our neighbor,’ which means that the criterion of our spiritual life is found in those around us. We should love others, not out of any presumed ‘goodness,’ but out of a sense of responsibility which we have towards them.”

+ Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra

If your heart has been softened either by repentance before God or by learning the boundless love of God towards you, do not be proud with those whose hearts are still hard. Remember how long your heart was hard and incorrigible. Seven brothers were ill in one hospital. One recovered from his illness and got up and rushed to serve his other brothers with brotherly love, to speed their recovery. Be like this brother. Consider all men to be your brothers, and sick brothers at that. And if you come to feel that God has given you better health than others, know that it is given through mercy, so in health you may serve your frailer brothers.

+ St. Nikolai Velimirovic

You fast, but Satan does not eat. You labor fervently, but Satan never sleeps. The only dimension with which you can outperform Satan is by acquiring humility, for Satan has no humility.

+ St. Moses the Ethiopian

Mercy and justice in one soul is like a man who worships God and the idols in one house. Mercy is opposed to justice. Justice is the equality of the even scale, for it gives to each as he deserves; and when it makes recompense, it does not incline to one side or show respect of persons. Mercy, on the other hand, is a sorrow and pity stirred up by goodness, and it compassionately inclines a man in the direction of all; it does not requite a man who is deserving of evil, and to him who is deserving of good it gives a double portion. If, therefore, it is evident that mercy belongs to the portion of righteousness, then justice belongs to the portion of wickedness. As grass and fire cannot co-exist in one place, so justice and mercy cannot abide in one soul. As a grain of sand cannot counterbalance a great quantity of gold, so in comparison God’s use of justice cannot counterbalance His mercy.

+ St. Isaac the Syrian

# Lenten Prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto ages of ages. Amen.