

POSSIBLE Prayer of the Church 🕊️ **11th Sunday after Trinity, August 16th 2026**

Heavenly Father, we poor sinners beg of You this day to be merciful unto us and to all those in need for whom we pray this day. [Possible silence]

Be merciful to us, Heavenly Father, for daily we are tempted by Satan, and daily we sin and transgress Your will. For the sake of Christ Jesus and His bitter suffering and death upon the Cross, forgive us. **LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, who raised Your Son from the dead, raise up men in Your Church with the humble conviction of Your Saints of old [like St. Paul] to labor abundantly for the sake of preaching Your grace in Christ. **LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

O God, Father of all, build up the families of Your Church, that they may share Your own love and provide for their own, in Your name and with Your blessing. **LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Gracious LORD, be merciful to our land, that those with any authority would exercise it with wisdom and righteousness, and that we would have peaceful days. Be merciful to the nations of the world, that wars would cease and harmony be restored. **LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, settle the solitary into the family of Your Church, and go before all Your people in their trials [*especially **Our Savior & Faith Prayers.***] ... and all those we each name and keep in our hearts in personal prayer. Grant them to rejoice in Your goodness, grace and mercy in Your good and gracious Will. **LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, bless us as we prepare to receive Your gifts in the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. Forgive our sins, strengthen our faith and confirm us in the knowledge that You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. **LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We thank You, Lord God, for all Your people who have gone before us and now rest in Your presence. Keep us faithful with them until that day when You make all things new. **LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**

TRINITY-11 Luke 18:9-14 LET'S TALK ABOUT SIN & BEHAVIOR 8.16.26 F.OS

WE LIKE "ATTABOYS" Who doesn't like an "**Attaboy!**" when they do something good? It's why we have "honor societies" in school. It is the reason we have scholarship awards as we head into college. "**Attaboy!**" stands behind all those accolades high achievers get throughout life: Rhode's scholarships, purple hearts, Silver stars, gold statues, merit raises for school teachers, making partner in a big firm, getting re-elected (in any organization, at any level). "**Attaboys!**" reward the gracious, good, above-and-beyond behaviors we see in others. Good persons deserve good things.

BEHAVIOR/AL [PROBLEM] The problem is that our vision of "good behavior" can get extremely **myopic, extremely near-sighted**. We only are able to see the good in those who stand closest to us. We don't see it in those far off.

ACCEPTABLE vs. OTHER In this week's Gospel Parable the good-living, well-meaning Pharisee and the [**ne'er-do-well**] tax collector are set up as ideal types of the "acceptable" vs. the "other." The contrast couldn't be sharper. The Pharisee examines himself, and finds no fault in himself. The tax collector **lets God examine him**, and throws himself on the bar of God's justice [receiving mercy as God does]. Ironically, the Pharisee treats God as a **debt collector** and the **Tax collector, who IS a debt collector, treats God as a Savior.**

LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION: When we talk about sin, Are we referring primarily to the problem of how we need to get our outward actions under control, **OR** are we referring to a deadly inward spiritual condition? Are we simply dealing with the need for a change in behavior, or are we really dealing with a fallen human nature that is corrupted to the core?

ANSWER/S TO QUESTIONS **The way you answer those questions is very important.** Because it will define the way you approach God and worship Him. If you think that religion is primarily about keeping your behavior in line, then you will become like the Pharisee. Now to us the Pharisee sounds awfully arrogant and self-absorbed – and he is. But I'm sure he thinks that he is pleasing God. [He essentially says,] "*Look God, I've gotten my actions under control just like you want. I fast and pray, I give money to the church, I don't engage in the sins that exist all around me in the world. I thank You that I am a good person and not like that thieving, unclean tax collector over there.*" The Pharisee doesn't need a God to save him, just a god to give him a little boost here and there and point him in the right direction so that he can make his own way in life and work his way to heaven through his own doing.

SAME TODAY **People today still think of religion in the same way**, as a sort of spiritual self-help program, a way of getting yourself right with God. You must admit that you have a bit of the Pharisee in you, too. You may say the words, "**I, a poor, miserable sinner...**" but often you don't really think you're all that bad; you've just made a few mistakes and have a few flaws that need correcting, that's all. And have you ever found yourself comparing yourself to others and priding yourself that you're not like them? The Pharisee's worship still exists today even among us and in our hearts.

CON.WORP. And the Pharisee's worship also shows itself today in much of what is going on in **so-called contemporary worship**. Like the Pharisee, much of contemporary worship fails to see the gravity and the seriousness of the sinful condition, and so it tends to focus more on behaviors and feelings. **Instead of centering primarily on Christ and His works**, sermons will focus more on your life and your works. Principles for living will be the theme of the preaching. How to improve your relationships or be more successful or live the victorious Christian life will be the focus. People today are clamoring for worship that is more relevant and practical - in other words, worship that's all about them. Of course, the Pharisee's worship was also all about him. Remember his **so-called** prayer? "*God, I thank you that I am not like other men ... I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.*"

ARROGANCE We think the Pharisee is arrogant. It's time we start recognizing the arrogance of those pastors and laypeople who think that they can take the church's liturgy and cut and paste it and do whatever they please with it as if it were their own. **It's one thing** to have new hymns and new settings of music which are theologically sound and appropriate for divine service. **It's quite another thing** to take the time-tested treasures of the church and cavalierly cast them aside in favor of **shallow songs and musical performances which are more fitting for a theater** than for a Holy House of God.

HAVE-SIN, NEED-SAVIOR **If you don't have much sin, then you don't need much of a Savior either, do you?** The tax collector, however, knows that he **has great sin and that he needs a great Savior**. And that's what makes his worship so different from the Pharisee, who has the very same root condition. The tax collector knows the truth, that not only does he have outward sins of various sorts, but that **all these sins flow from an unclean heart and a human nature that is in bondage** to death. He comes with no thought at all that any good works of his own will merit anything before God. He knows even his good works are tainted and polluted. He cries out his only hope, "*God be merciful to me a sinner!*" He knows that nothing but the mercy of God can save him and he relies on that alone.

SERIOUS SITUATION **You also must learn to humble yourself before God in this way**, to recognize the absolute **seriousness of the situation** and your **desperate need** for help and mercy. Don't fool yourself into thinking that it's just a matter of getting your act together. **St. Paul** says in **Romans 7** that **nothing good dwells in us in our fallen state, nothing that could even begin to put us right with God**. There is a **spiritual cancer eating away at you and me**. That's why the wrong things you don't want to do, you end up doing. And the good things you do want to do, you don't. That's why idle hands are the devil's workshop. That's why you fall so easily into temptation when you know you can get away with it. And so we must finally cry out with St. Paul, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, (He will deliver me) through Jesus Christ our LORD."

SOLA GRATIA This is what the Bible means when it say that we are "**Sola Gratia**" = **Saved by Grace Alone. It's entirely God's doing in**

Christ. We were dead in trespasses and sins. **And dead people can't save themselves**. But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive again through Christ's Resurrection from the dead. He takes people like us, who are no better than the miserable tax collector, and through the shed blood of Christ, He cleanses us of our sin and declares us to be righteous in His sight. **[Ephesians 2:8-9]** "*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that **not of yourselves**; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*"

NOT OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS **The Pharisee trusted in himself that HE was righteous**. He foolishly relied on his own good works, and in the end he was damned. But we do not believe in ourselves as the world would have us do. We believe in Christ and His good works. We are saved through faith in Him alone. That is what saves the tax collector, not simply his humble plea, but his believing in Christ. When the tax collector prays for mercy, he uses a word [**Greek: ἱλάσκομαι** = hi-lah-sko-my] that has to do with the sacrifices there in the temple, which foreshadowed Good Friday. The tax collector desires **the atonement for sin that only God can provide through the shedding of blood**. Remember, it was precisely at these times of public prayer in the temple when an animal would be offered up on the altar according to God's command to cover the sins of the people. **Therefore, at the very moment in which the tax collector prays, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"** his prayer was being answered there in the sacrifice which the LORD provided. **The tax collector trusted in this mercy of the LORD**, and he yearned for the day when the Messiah would come and fulfill all these things.

DECLARED RIGHTEOUS So it is that **the tax collector goes down to his house justified = declared righteous** in God's sight. And so it is **for each of you who pray in humility and penitent faith, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"** The sacrifice has been made also for you, not on the altar of the temple, but on the altar of the Cross. There Christ, the Lamb of God was offered up once and for all. By His shed blood your sin has been fully atoned for. As it is written, "*You who once **were far off** [just like the tax collector stood far off] have been **brought near** by the Blood of Christ.*"

YOU GO HOME TODAY You will go down to **your** house justified today **NOT** because of what you have done for God, but because of what He has done for you. He humbled Himself even to the point of death, so that you might be exalted with Him to His life. He **baptized** you and turned you from a child of wrath to a child of grace. He **comforts** you now with His words of mercy and feeds you His own true body and blood, like a holy medicine, **like the most powerful chemotherapy**, to cure your sin-disease and to prepare your bodies for the Resurrection to Life everlasting on the Last Day.

HUMBLE Y/OURSELVES Brothers and sisters of Christ, let us **ever** come before God as the tax collector did, humbling ourselves before Him, trusting in His mercy, that He may lift us up in due time. We then echo the words of the hymn writer, **[ELH #286 "Rock of Ages" v.3]**

"Nothing in my hands I bring, - Simply to Thy Cross I cling." IJ'N, Amen.
SDG