

In this week's Gospel, we hear one of the great parables of our Lord on the subject of prayer (Luke 18:9-14). In the parable, a Pharisee approaches God in prayer and boasts of his self-righteousness and superiority over other men in general and over a particular nearby tax collector in particular. Meanwhile, the tax collector recognizes and humbly confesses his sins and pleads for mercy. In the end, the tax collector is admitted to the company of the righteous while the Pharisee is condemned. I offer you an excerpt from a homily by a Bishop and theologian from the 14th Century, St. Gregory Palamas:

[In] The present parable ... the tax collector, in spite of his profession and of having lived in the depths of sin, joins the ranks of those living upright lives through a single prayer, and that a short one; he is relieved of his burden of sin, he is lifted up, he rises above all evil, and is admitted to the company of the righteous, justified by the impartial Judge himself. The Pharisee, on the other hand, is condemned by his prayer in spite of being a Pharisee, and in his own eyes a person of importance. Because his "righteousness" is false and his insolence extreme, every syllable he utters provokes God's anger.

But why does humility raise us to the heights of holiness, and self-conceit plunge us into the abyss of sin? It is because when we have a high regard for ourselves, and that in the presence of God, he quite reasonably abandons us, since we think we have no need of his assistance. But when we regard ourselves as nothing and therefore look to heaven for mercy, it is not unreasonable that we should obtain God's compassion, help, and grace. For as Scripture says: *The Lord resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*

This man went away justified, and not the other, says the Lord; because all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be exalted. For since the devil is pride itself, and arrogance his own particular vice, this sin conquers and drags down with itself every human virtue tinged with it. Similarly, humility before God is the virtue of the good angels, and it conquers every human vice to which a sinner has fallen prey.

Humility is the chariot in which the ascent to God is made upon the clouds that are to carry up to him those destined to be with God for endless ages, according to the Apostle's prophecy: *We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be always with the Lord.* For humility is like a cloud. Produced by repentance, it draws streams of tears from the eyes, makes unworthy people worthy, and raises up and presents to God those freely justified by reason of their right dispositions.

St. Gregory is right. Humility is the chariot that carries us into the presence of God; while self-righteousness and arrogance unite us with the devil and drag us down to the abyss. By the grace of God, may we shun all forms of self-conceit and self-righteousness and strive for our seat on the chariot of humility – the alternative is downright scary!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples

P.S. St. Paul understood Jesus' parable very well:

"Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:3–9, RSV2CE)





Solemnity of All Saints

Also known as All Saints Day

November 1

On the feast of All Saints, we honor those men and women who, whether they have been canonized or not, have led lives of heroic virtue that set an example for all Christians. Saints are big dreamers. They believe that with God on their side, no one and nothing can stop them. Saints are go-getters. They do not wait for someone else to do good first; they jump right in. Saints are love-bringers. They try to see Christ in every person and every situation. Saints tell us what matters most in life is not what we earn or own, not the job we have or the people we know. What really matters is how much we love God, others, and ourselves, and how well we show that love in all we do.

All Saints' Day is a major feast day in the Catholic Church. It serves as a universal commemoration of all saints, both known and unknown, who have attained eternal life in heaven through an earthly life of exceptional virtue, sacrifice, and faith. The earliest roots of All Saints' Day are found in the fourth century, when Christians began to collectively celebrate the memory of "all martyrs" who died for their faith. Following waves of invasions that disturbed the Christian catacombs in Rome, the event took on greater significance in the seventh century. Pope Boniface IV responded by gathering the bones of martyrs and saints, reintering them beneath the Pantheon (a former pagan temple) and rededicating the site to the Blessed Virgin Mary and all martyrs in 609 AD. Thus, the Church transformed a place of pagan worship into a center of Christian commemoration. Initially celebrated in May, the feast day was moved to November by Pope Gregory III in the eighth century, and later Pope Gregory IV extended its observance to the entire Church, establishing the date and the universal nature of the commemoration. Over time, the Catholic Church elevated the feast day as a Holy Day of Obligation, making attendance at Mass compulsory for Catholics, and marking the day as a central celebration in the liturgical year.

Early saints were often martyrs venerated by their local communities with little formal procedure, and many were recognized by popular acclamation without official sanction. The Church began formalizing the canonization process in the tenth century, culminating in an extremely rigorous system today that requires evidence of "heroic virtue," miracles, and enduring faith. Estimates indicate that there are more than 10,000 saints recognized by the Church. Saints represent all walks of life (children, scholars, royalty, peasants, clergy, widows, and ordinary people) affirming the Church's teaching that sanctity is attainable by everyone, not just a select few. Importantly, All Saints' Day does not merely honor those canonized officially; the feast also includes all men and women who have entered heaven, including those unknown to us, uncanonized, or commemorated only locally.

The Church's formal process for proclaiming saints proceeds through four steps: 1) **Servant of God**: The title given once a person's cause for sainthood officially opens and their life is being investigated for holiness. 2) **Venerable**: Declared by the Pope after confirming the individual lived a life of heroic virtue or offered their life for others. 3) **Blessed**: A person becomes "Blessed" after beatification, which usually requires one verified miracle attributed to their intercession (martyrs may be beatified without one). Beatification allows for local or regional veneration – for example, within a diocese, country, or religious community. 4) **Saint**: After canonization, which usually requires a second verified miracle, the person is officially declared a saint and may be venerated by the universal Church. This is an infallible declaration that the person is in Heaven and a model for all Christians.