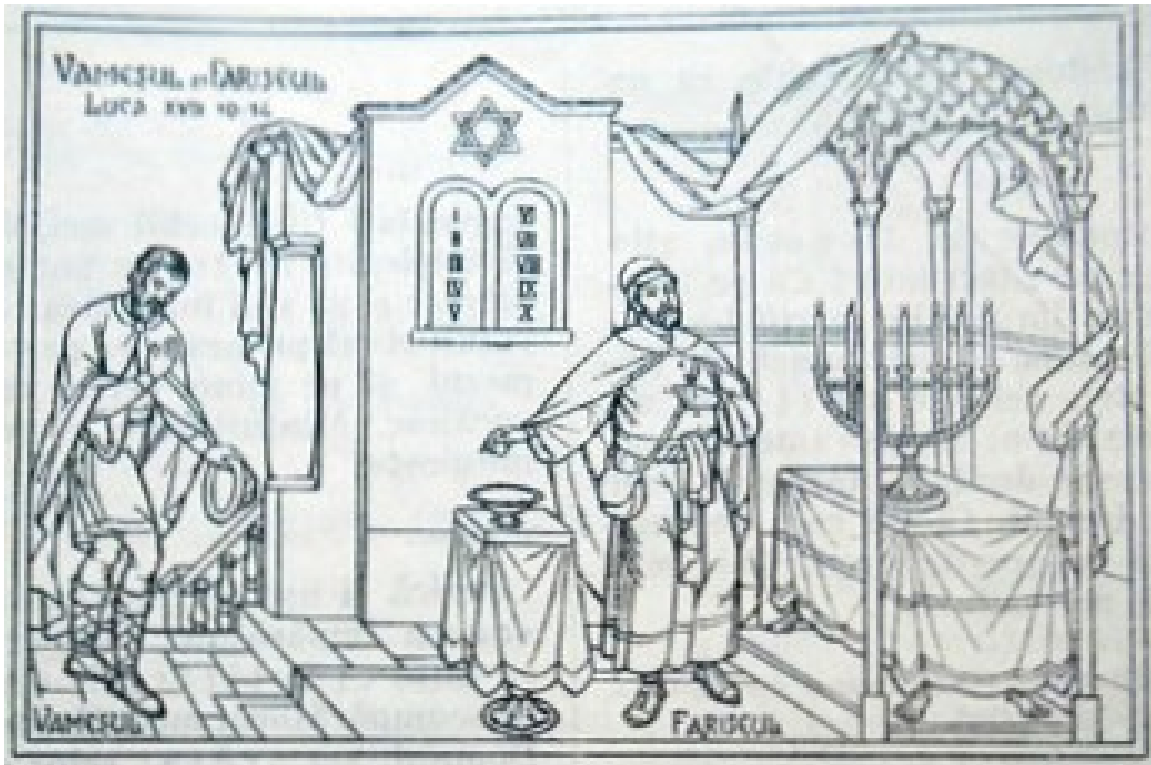


Readings & Hymns

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

(Beginning of the Lenten Triodion)



Troparion, Resurrection - Tone of the week, and of the Temple

verse: **Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;**

verse: **now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.**

Kontakion, Triodion, Publican and Pharisee - Tone 4

Let us flee from the pride of the Pharisee!

Let us learn humility from the Publican's tears!

Let us cry to our Savior:

"Have mercy on us, //

O only merciful One!"

The Prokeimenon - *In the Tone of the Week.*

Epistle

§ 296: II Timothy 3: 10 - 15 (Sunday)

***Reader:* The reading from the [second] Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to Timothy.**

MY SON TIMOTHY thou hast carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life,
purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience,

persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra.

What persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me!

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

But evil men and seducers shall grow worse and worse,
deceiving, and being deceived.

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and been assured of,
knowing from whom thou hast learned them,
and that from childhood thou hast known the Holy Scriptures,
which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith
which is in Christ Jesus.

The Alleluia - *In the Tone of the Week.*



Gospel

§ 89; Luke 18: 10 - 14 (*Sunday, Sixteenth of Luke, Publican & Pharisee*)

THE LORD SAID THIS PARABLE: ¹⁰ Two men went up into the temple to pray;
the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself,
God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers,
or even as this publican.

¹² I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

¹³ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes
unto heaven, but smote upon 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 every one that exalts himself shall be abased;
and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.

Stikhera of Repentance - Tone 8 *Sung from the Triodion on the Sundays of Pre-Lent and Great Lent.*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;

Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of Life, / For my spirit rises early to pray towards thy holy temple. / Bearing the temple of my body all defiled; / But in Thy compassion, // purify me by the loving kindness of Thy mercy.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Mother of God, / For I have profaned my soul with shameful sins, / and have wasted my life in laziness. / But by thine intercessions, // deliver me from all impurity.

Tone 6 Have mercy on me, O God, / according to Thy great mercy; / according to Thine abundant mercy, // blot out my transgression!

When I think of the many evil things I have done, / wretch that I am, / I tremble at the fearful day of judgement. / But trusting in Thy living kindness, / like David I cry to Thee: / Have mercy on me, O God, // according to Thy great mercy.



Sunday of the Publican & Pharisee, at Vespers:

Lord, I call ... Tone 1 Brethren, let us not pray as the Pharisee: / for he who exalts himself shall be humbled. / Let us humble ourselves before God, / and with fasting cry aloud as the Publican: // God be merciful to us sinners. *Luke 18: 10-14.*

A Pharisee, overcome with vainglory, / and a Publican, bowed down in repentance, / came to Thee the only Master. / The one boasted and was deprived of blessings, / while the other kept silent and was counted worthy of gifts. / Confirm me, O Christ our God, in these his cries of sorrow, // for Thou lovest mankind.

Tone 8 Almighty Lord, I know how great is the power of tears. / For they led up Hezekiah from the gates of death; / they delivered the sinful woman from the transgressions of many years; / they justified the Publican above the Pharisee, / And with them I also pray: // Have mercy upon me. 4 [2] Kgs. 20: 1-6; Luke 7: 36-50.

The Apostikha - Tone 5 Mine eyes are weighed down by my transgressions, / and I cannot lift them up and see the height of heaven. / But receive me, Savior, in repentance as the Publican // and have mercy on me. cf *Prayer of Manasses*.

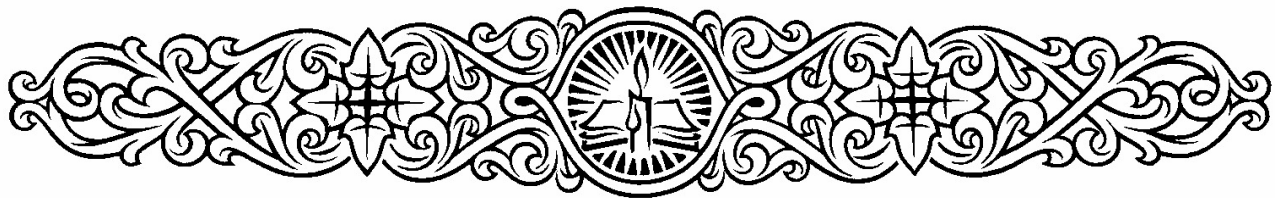
Exapostilarion

Let us flee from the wicked boasting of the Pharisee and let us learn the noble humility of the Publican, that we may be exalted and cry aloud with him to God: Be merciful unto Thy servants, Christ our Saviour, born of a Virgin, who hast of Thine own will endured the Cross and with Thyself raised up the world by Thy divine power.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Theotokion

The Maker of creation and the God of all took mortal flesh from thine undefiled womb, O Theotokos worthy of all praise, and He renewed the whole of my corrupted nature. As before childbirth, so He left thee again after childbirth. Therefore we all praise thee with faith and we cry: Rejoice! Glory of the world.



The Publican and the Pharisee

Father Alexander Schmemmann

One of the main distinctive features of the gospels, and quite unique to them, are the short stories known as parables which Jesus used in his teaching and meetings with people. What is most striking is that these parables, told two thousand years ago in conditions utterly unlike our own, in a different civilization, in an absolutely different language, remain up-to-date and right on target, going straight to our heart. Other books and words written only recently, perhaps yesterday or the day before, are already old news, forgotten, vanished into oblivion. Already they don't speak to us, they're dead. But these parables, so apparently simple and unsophisticated, continue full of life. We listen to them and something happens to us, as if someone were looking straight into the deepest part of our life and telling us something just about ourselves, just about me.

In this parable of the Publican and the Pharisee we have a story about two men. The Publican was a tax-collector, an occupation universally despised in the ancient world. The Pharisee belonged to the ruling party, the elite of that society and government. In contemporary language we could say that the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee is a symbolic story about a respected representative of the ruling class, on the one hand, and a petty, disreputable "apparatchik" on the other. Christ says:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The pharisee stood and prayed thus within himself, "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get." 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!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Lk 18:10-14)

The story takes up only five short verses in the gospel, yet it contains something eternal that applies to all times and situations. For now, however, let's consider the parable only in light of our own time and ourselves. If anything lies at the foundation of our government, society, and yes, our personal lives, then it is the Pharisee's continuous self-promotion, self-affirmation, or to use a more venerable and eternal word, pride. Listening to the heartbeat of our times, we can't but be amazed at the frightening self-advertisement, boasting and shameless self-praise that has entered our life so completely that we almost don't notice it. All self-criticism, self-examination, self-assessment, and any hint of humility have become not simply weaknesses, but worse, a social or even a government crime. Loving one's country now means forever

praising it brazenly while belittling other nations. Loyalty now means forever proclaiming the sinlessness of authorities. To be human now means to demean and trample others, raising yourself up by putting others down. Analyzing your life and the life of your society, its basic structure, you will surely admit that this is an accurate description. The world in which we live is so permeated with deafening boastfulness, it has become so natural a part of living, that we ourselves don't even notice it. This indeed was Boris Pasternak's observation, as one of the greatest and most clear-sighted poets of our time: "... everything is drowning in phariseeism ..." Most frightening, of course, is that phariseeism is accepted as virtue. We have been inundated so long and so persistently with glory, accomplishments, triumphs; we have so long been held captive in an atmosphere of illusory pseudo-greatness, that all this now seems good and right. Imprinted on the soul of whole generations is now an image of the world in which power, pride and shameless self-praise are the norm. It is time to be horrified by all this and to remember the words of the gospel: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled."

At present, those few who are just beginning to talk about this, in a whisper, who little by little remind the world of this, are shunted off to court or imprisoned in psychiatric hospitals. They are hounded without pity: "Look at these traitors! They oppose the greatness and might of their country! They are against its accomplishments! They have doubts that we are the best, most powerful, most free, most happy country of all. Be thankful that you are not like these unfortunate renegades." And so on ... But understand that the argument, the war being waged by this embattled minority, is a fight for the spiritual foundations of our very life, because the Pharisee's pride is not merely words. Sooner or later his pride fills with hatred and turns on those who refuse to acknowledge his greatness, his perfection. It turns on them with persecution and terror. It leads to death. Christ's parable is like a scalpel lancing the worst pus-filled boil of the contemporary world: the pride of the pharisee. For as long as this boil grows, the world will be ruled by hatred, fear and blood. And that is the situation today.

Only in returning to the forgotten, discredited, and discarded power of humility will the world be made clean. For humility means acceptance and respect of the other, the courage to admit one's own imperfection, to repent, and to set out on the path toward correction. To leave the boasting, lies and darkness of the Pharisee, and to return to the light and wholeness of genuine humanity. To turn toward truth, toward humility, and toward love. This is the call of Christ's parable, and this is the invitation, the first invitation of the lenten spring ...

SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE

Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh. February 4, 1990

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

How short, and how well known today's parable, and yet, how intense its message, how challenging ...

Intense it is in its very words: two men come into the church of God, into a sacred realm which in a world that is lost to Him, belongs to Him unreservedly: into His Divine Realm. And one of the men walks boldly into it, takes a stand before God; the other one comes, and doesn't even dare cross the threshold: he is a sinner, and the Realm is holy, like the space around the Burning Bush in the desert which Moses could not enter without having unshod his feet, otherwise than in adoration and the fear of God.

And how different the words spoken! Apparently the Pharisee praises God, he gives Him glory – but for what? Because He has made a man like him, a man so holy, so worthy of Him, of God; a man who not only keeps all the commandments of the Law, but goes beyond of what God Himself has commanded, and can expect of man. Indeed, he stands before God praising Him, that he, the Pharisee, is so wonderful that he is God's own glory, the shining, the revelation of God's holiness ...

The Publican does not dare enter into the holy Realm of God.

And the parable is clear: the man who came and stood brokenhearted, ashamed of himself, knowing that he is unworthy of entering this sacred space goes back home forgiven, loved, indeed: accompanied by God Himself Who came into the world to save sinners and Who stands by everyone who needs Him, who recognises his need, or not, unto salvation.

The Pharisee goes home, but he goes home *less* forgiven; his relationship with God is not the same; *he* is at the center, God is peripheric to him; *he* is at the heart of things, God is subservient to him. It does not mean that what he did was worthless; it simply means that as far as he is concerned, it has born no fruit of holiness in himself. The deeds were good, but they were spoiled, poisoned by pride, by self-assertion; the beauty of what he did was totally marred because it was addressed neither to God nor to his neighbour; it was turned in on himself. And we are told that this pride has despoiled this man, has taken away from him the fruits of his good works, the fruit of his outward faithfulness to the law of God, that only humility could have given him and his action full meaning, that only humility could have made his actions into life, into the waters of life gushing into eternity.

But then, the question stands before us: how can we learn *anything* about humility if that is the *absolute* condition to be not like the barren fig tree, but fruitful, to be rich harvest and from whom people can be fed.

I do not know that we can move from pride, vanity into humility in a single unless something so tragic happens to us that we see ourselves, we discover ourselves completely bereft of everything that supported our sinful, destructive, barren condition. But there is one thing which we can do: however much we think that we are possessed of gifts of all sorts of heart and mind, of body and soul, however fruitful our action may be, we can remember the words of Saint Paul: O, man! What have you got which was not *given* you?!.. And indeed, he echoes at this point what Christ said in the first Beatitude, the Beatitude that opens the door to all other Beatitudes, the Beatitude which is the beginning of understanding: *Blessed are the poor in spirit ...* Blessed are those who know, not only with their intellect – but at least with their intellect! – that they are nothing, and they possess nothing which is not a gift of God.

We were called into being out of naught, without our participation: our very existence is a gift! We were given life which we could not create, call out of ourselves. We have been given the knowledge of the existence of God, and indeed, a deeper, more intimate knowledge of God – all that is gift! And then, all that we are is a gift of God: our body, our heart, our mind, our soul – what power have we got over them when God does no longer sustain them? The greatest intelligence can of a sudden be swallowed into darkness by a stroke; there are moments when we are confronted with a need that requires all our sympathy, all our love – and we discover that our hearts are of stone and of ice ... We want to do good – and we cannot; and Saint Paul knew it already when he said: The good which I love, I don't do, and the wrong which I hate I do continuously ... And our body depends on so many things!

And what of our relationships, of the friendship which is given us, the love which sustains us, the comradeship – everything that we are and which we possess is a gift: what is the next move: isn't it gratitude? Can't we turn to God not as a pharisee, priding ourselves of what we are and forgetting that all that is his, but turning to God and saying: O, God! All that is a gift from You! all that beauty, intelligence, a sensitive heart, all the circumstances of life are a gift! Indeed, all those circumstances, even those which frighten us are a gift because God says to us: I trust you enough to *send you* into the darkness to bring light! I send you into corruption to be the salt that stops corruption! I send you where there is no hope to bring hope, where there is no joy to bring joy, no love to bring love ... and one could go on, on, on, seeing that when we are send into the darkness it is to be God's presence and God's life, and that means that He trusts us – He *trusts* us, He believes in us, He hopes for us *everything*: isn't that enough to be grateful?

But gratitude is not just a cold word of thanks; gratitude means that we wish to make Him see that all that was not given in vain, that He did not become man, lived, died in vain; gratitude means a life that could give joy to God: this is a challenge of this particular parable ...

Yes, the ideal would be for us to be humble – but what is humility? Who of us knows, and if someone knows, who can communicate it to everyone who doesn't know? But gratitude we all know; we know small ways, and small aspects of it! Let us reflect on it, and, let us in an act of gratitude recognise that we have no right to be in God's own realm – and He lets us in! We have no right to commune to Him either in prayer, or in sacrament – and He calls us to commune with Him! We have no right to be His children, to be brothers and sisters of Christ, to be the dwelling place of the Spirit – and He grants it all in an act of love!

Let each of us reflect and ask himself: in what way can he or she be *so* grateful in such a way that God could rejoice that He has not given in vain, been in vain, lived and died in vain, that we have received the message. And if we grow in true depth of gratitude, at the depth of gratitude we will knock down, adore the Lord, and learn what humility is – not abasement, but adoration, the awareness that He is all we possess, all that we are, and that we are open to Him like the earth, the rich earth is open to the plough, to the sowing, to the seed, to the sunshine, to the rain, to everything in order to bring fruit. Amen!

Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh. February 7, 1993

Two weeks ago we heard the Gospel relating the story of the blind man, Bartimaeus (St Luke XVIII :35-43), and last week that of Zacchaeus (St Luke XIX: 1-10).

Bartimaeus had been blind, perhaps all his life, or perhaps at a certain moment he had lost sight of all the beauty of the world, of human faces, of everything that related him directly through the created world to God who made all things. He was a blind man. One day a crowd passed by him, a strange crowd – not just a noisy crowd of passers-by, but a crowd that had a centre, and the centre was the Lord Jesus Christ. Bartimaeus perceived the uniqueness of this crowd and asked who it was that made it into a whole; and then he began to cry for help, to be freed from his blindness.

How many times have we been blind, or how many years have we all lived blind? Blind to that revelation of God which the created world is offering us; blind to beauty, not to its external quality but to the shining of the divine wisdom and the divine beauty through it. How often have we looked at faces and never seen that they are icons of God that should relate us to God, and not stand between God and us as a temptation. How often has Christ passed quite close to us and we have never noticed His presence and His passing?

Let us reflect on ourselves and ask ourselves not only how often we were blind in the past, but how blind we are at this present hour. Christ is in our midst. Are we aware of it? Christ meets us in every person. Are we aware of that? One of the Desert Fathers said: "He who has seen his neighbour has seen his God". Yes, an image of God, a real image. Damaged indeed like so many icons, desecrated or damaged; damaged to the point, at times, of being unrecognisable, and yet, a divine image.

Last week we heard about Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus overcame another temptation which is very familiar to us, that of vanity; vanity that consists in attaching ourselves to things of no value and trying to derive through them the admiration of other people who have no right to judge, because they also are prisoners of the same smallness of mind and smallness of heart. Vanity, in the words of St John Climacus, is arrogance before God and cowardice before men; a desire not to be judged, not to be condemned, but to be admired, to be praised, to be approved of, even for things that are not worthy of approval, just to be approved.

I suggested last week that we must concentrate our attention on that particular sin of ours and ask ourselves how dependent am I on the judgement of men, how indifferent am I to the judgement of my own conscience and beyond it, through it, of God Himself? How much do I look for approval and admiration of things that are unworthy of me, not only to speak of God?

To-day we are confronted with a third image; we are confronted with the story of the Pharisee and of the Publican (St Luke XVIII: 10-14). The Publican was aware of his unworthiness, he was aware that he was unworthy of presenting himself before the face of God, but also of being admitted into the company of respectable people, people of whom God would approve. He came to the door of the Temple and could not cross the threshold because he knew that in this world – soiled, polluted, desecrated by human sin, by blood and evil in all its forms, the Temple was a place which was devoted to God alone. All the rest of the world, to use a phrase of satan tempting Christ, all the rest of the world “has been betrayed into my hands by man”. But the Temple is a space which men of faith, frail indeed but believing in God, cut out of this realm of horror to be a vision of divine beauty, a dwelling place for the One who has nowhere to rest His Head in a world that was stolen from Him and betrayed into the hands of the adversary.

As the Publican stood on the threshold he knew that he belonged to the realm of evil, and had no access into the realm of God; and yet, he felt the difference, he felt horror at himself and a sense of worship, of adoration with regard to the Divine Realm. He beat his chest and asked for mercy because there was nothing else he could hope for and count on.

And the Pharisee stood right in the middle of the Church; he had walked in and taken his stand there as one who had the right to be there. Why? Not because he was a man of pure heart, but because he was faithful to every one of the formal rules established by the Synagogue, as a number of us are faithful to the outer, external rules of life that do not penetrate even through our skin, which do not reach our heart, which do not give a new shape and meaning to our thoughts.

So, again, we are confronted by two men and asked by Christ: who are you? Are you one who is so deeply aware of the sanctity of God that he knows that, apart from

a God who would step down to us to heal and save, there is no access to Him. Or are we like the Pharisee who would say to God, throw it in His face: I have done all that is prescribed. You have nothing to ask of me!.. We are not that arrogant because we have not even the courage of being arrogant as the Pharisee was, neither have we got the constancy of courage to be as faithful as he was to the full of the life of the law.

Let us ask ourselves then: Do we emulate the Pharisee in deed, outwardly faithful to all the tenets of our Christian Faith? And beyond this, do we allow our Faith to transform our heart, to rule our will, to enlighten our mind?

This is the task which the Gospel offers us. Think about it. It will be one more step to pronouncing upon ourselves a judgement so that we are not condemned.

Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh. February 20, 2000

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

On our journey towards Lent, and beyond Lent towards Easter, we come to a series of parables which must prepare us to our journey through Lent. And today's parable speaks to us of the pharisee and of the publican.

The publican came into the church knowing that he has no right to be there. In what sense? The church is a small place on earth which is totally dedicated to God, which belongs to God alone, in which God has a right to live, into which we come to meet Him, and no-one else. O, of course, everyone else, but only together with Him. And the publican stood by the door knowing that he is a stranger and that his only hope lay in the fact that God loves. He had said in the Old Testament, 'Child, give Me thy heart — all the rest belongs to Me'.

So, we can come and give our heart to God, and only then can we walk into this sacred ground.

The pharisee lived according to rules; he thought, he felt that he did everything that was expected of him according to the Law, he had rights before God; he had a right to be in God's realm, he was one of His people. And therefore, looking round he could compare others who in his eyes were not worthy of the same.

Let us reflect on ourselves; when we come to church: are we aware that it is a realm into which we can come only if our heart has been given to God, and if our heart has become His dwelling place? And also, if we have tried, however hard, however honestly to live according to the Gospel, can we say 'I am worthy', can I say 'I have a right to be here'? No, it is only love that can give us a right; it is only our love, mutual, and our love to God that can allow us to enter into this sacred realm. And when we come, let us stop one moment by the door, and think, 'This realm is sacred; it is God's dwelling place; let me enter into it with all my heart;' turn to God and say, 'Lord, I am unworthy, and yet, I am loved; I am impure, and yet I can love Thee, O Lord, and the people around me. Imperfectly, but this is the only ground on which I can stand here'.

Amen.

THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE ON A COMMUTER TRAIN

Priest Dimitry Vydumkin, February 16, 2019

A man (Mikhail by name) recently [last year] posted a short story in a social network that was instantly reposted by many. The story is as follows (leaving out the swear words):

“I was on an electric train on my way from Moscow to Petushki. Suddenly a tramp came into the carriage – all bruised up, with a bloated, puffy face. He was about thirty years old. Looking around, he said: “Dear all, I haven’t eaten anything for three days. I’m honest. I don’t want to be a thief because I won’t be able to run away if they try to catch me. But I’m so hungry! Give me as much money as you can. Don’t even look at my face; I admit I drink heavily. And the money you give me, I’ll spend it on drinking too!” And then he proceeded along the carriage.

Here in Russia people are very generous; they swiftly collected about five hundred rubles (about \$7.50) The tramp stopped at the end of the carriage, turned back facing the people, bowed and said, “Thank you! May God save you all!”

A malicious looking man sitting by the window in the back of the carriages – he looked like a scientist and wore a pair of glasses – suddenly burst out screaming at the tramp, “You, scumbag! You’re panhandling, asking for money! And I don’t have enough money to feed my family. And what if I have been fired lately?! I’m not a beggar like you.”

After hearing all this, the tramp took everything he had managed to collect that day (about two thousand rubles, both notes and coins) out of his pockets and stretched out his hand to give the money to the man:

“Take it. You need it.”

“What?” answered the man dumbfounded.

“Take it. You need it more than I do. People are very kind!” insisted the tramp, putting the money into his hands. Then he turned around and left the carriage.

“You, stop here!” exclaimed the man instantly rising from his seat with the money in his hands. He followed the tramp. The whole carriage was unanimously silent. For the next five minutes, we attentively listened to their dialogue in the train vestibule. The man was screaming that people were rotten, while the tramp was convicted people were generous and wonderful. The man tried to give the money back to the tramp but he wouldn’t take it. In the end, the tramp went further along the train and the man was left alone in the vestibule. He seemed reluctant to go back into the carriage. He lit a cigarette.

The train arrived at a station. Passengers got in and off the train. The man put out

the cigarette, came back into the carriage and took his window seat. No one paid any special attention to him – the carriage lived its own life. The train arrived at some stations; some passengers got off, and some people got in.

Five stations were behind us and the train was approaching mine. I stood up and moved towards the exit. As I passed by I cast a glance at the man. With his head turned back to the window, the malicious man sat there crying.”

I would rather we left a story like this (and I believe that it is a real story) without any comments. But the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee can be grounds for our pondering over what happened in that story. In the parable we all heard at Divine Liturgy today (Luke 18:10-14), the Lord intentionally rejects the existing stereotypes about good and the evil, about those who are good and those who are evil. And it’s definitely for a reason that the parable’s characters are two individuals diametrically opposed in their moral views. For society, the Pharisee is an definitely righteous man, for he is perfectly aware of the subtlest aspects of the law and knows how to obey it. The Publican is definitely a sinner, a sinner by definition, for he has to work for an oppressive government; making use of this shameful benefit, shameful in and of itself, he illegally takes money from his countrymen. Reproving this, Christ directs our attention to two points. Firstly, it’s not meticulous obedience to the law, but a person’s adequate worldview that bears true righteousness. Therefore, a sinful way of life can make an individual righteous for the Lord (provided that the individual rejects the sin, of course); or on the contrary, an outwardly righteous life may lead to a nearly insurmountable barrier between the man and the Lord, when the man ignores the real Source of righteousness and grows in his complacency. The second conclusion we reach is moral. We should avoid any kind of judgment: the mere thought of judgment gives us no chance to know the truth, it’s too superficial. It’s tantamount to our attempt to imagine the size of an iceberg by its white top protruding over the water.

This electric train story perfectly illustrates the truthfulness of Christ’s parable to contemporary man – it unveils the false stereotypes and leads us to moral conclusions. Who did society take the malicious man yelling at the tramp for? He was a man who didn’t show any signs of sinfulness – a well-dressed middle-aged man, he seemed to be neither a drinker nor a beggar. We cannot compare him with the tramp, who spent his whole youth on drinking and was then panhandling. That tramp wasn’t even ashamed to say he wasn’t a thief, for he would be incapable of running away, and that he would squander the money the people gave him on alcohol. What a sinner!

Let us not ignore the fact that we, Christians, sometimes succumb to making similar judgments! Therefore what happened in the story should be a lesson to us, first of all. In the outcome, the passengers warmed up to the bruised tramp, who behaved more righteously than the man who “looked like a scientist and wore a pair glasses”. But

why did he behave that way? I believe that we may find a clue about the behavior of that electric train Publican in his own words. Apparently, he realizes what a slave to his passion he is; he realizes that at that very moment that he would not be able to resist the temptation. He speaks about it openly and frankly. Nevertheless, the passengers sympathize with him and give him money, which cannot but instill a feeling of gratitude in him. In his heart, the gratitude bore the answer revealed by his unselfish mercy. Moreover, he was aware that “people were generous and wonderful”, that the next time they would also give him money! The “malicious looking man” looks more like the Pharisee, which is revealed by his own words full of apparent complacency and severe condemnation of the beggar.

God, save us from judging anyone! We’d better give thought to whether we behave like the “malicious looking man”. Before he yelled at the tramp, the former reached the carriage’s end. Only God knows how many people of those who didn’t give any money to the tramp judged him, but they did not dare yell at him. How many of them passed their judgment on him without even giving him a cent. By doing so, they deprived themselves of the chance to take part in the act of mercy that the tramp would soon perform. I wish at least one of them might have learned a lesson and made a promise to both God and himself that he would never judge anyone.

The Pharisee, I assume, was the one who learned the most precious lesson in the story. What the tramp did impresses even those who just read about it, not to mention the one to whom the tramp showed mercy. The tear rolling down his cheek at the end of the story proves Christ’s truth – that good overcomes evil. It must be the main conclusion we should arrive at reading this amazing, modern, true story. ...