



Saturday of the 3rd Week of Lent



Date: Saturday, March 29, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C

First Reading: Hosea 6:1–6

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51:3–4, 18–19, 20–21b | **Response:** Psalm 6:6

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 95:8

Gospel Reading: Luke 18:9–14

Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

There are moments in life when we believe ourselves to be at our best—when we are confident in our achievements, our virtues, and our standing before God. And yet, how often does the human heart betray itself? How often does the mask of righteousness slip to reveal a soul too assured of its own sanctity, too blind to its need for mercy? The readings today pull back that veil and expose the deeper truth: God desires not sacrifice, but mercy; not pride, but humility; not outward performance, but an inward conversion of heart.

Hosea's prophetic words resonate with an aching poignancy: "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn, that he may heal us." It sounds like a plea of sincerity, a cry from a wounded people longing for restoration. And yet, the Lord's response reveals something unsettling: "Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away." The conversion of the people is fleeting, a shallow contrition that disappears with the first heat of the day. Hosea exposes a faith that is transactional—one that seeks God's favor but refuses the deeper transformation He requires. The prophet reminds us that God is not interested in hollow rituals or superficial devotions. He seeks something greater: the steadfast love of a contrite heart, the authentic return of a soul that knows its need for grace.

The psalm takes up this theme, giving voice to the tax collector in Jesus' parable even before the Gospel is proclaimed: "Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense." This is the prayer of one who does not barter with God, who does not present a list of accomplishments as proof of righteousness, but who throws himself entirely upon

divine mercy. It is the prayer of David after his fall, the song of every sinner who has encountered the abyss of his own frailty and yet dares to hope in God's unfailing love.

Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector cuts to the very heart of this Lenten season. The Pharisee stands before God in confidence, reciting his virtues, enumerating his good deeds. He fasts, he tithes, he follows the Law to the letter. And yet, he leaves the temple unjustified. Why? Because his righteousness has become a wall between himself and God. He is so certain of his holiness that he no longer sees his need for grace. The tax collector, by contrast, stands at a distance. He does not lift his eyes. He beats his breast and prays the simplest, most profound of prayers: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." And he goes home justified.

This parable is not an indictment of piety. Jesus is not condemning fasting, tithing, or prayer—indeed, these are good and necessary practices. But He is warning against a faith that is so focused on personal achievement that it forgets the fundamental truth of the Gospel: that we are all in need of mercy. In a society where self-sufficiency is often prized above all else, where power and prestige can define our worth, this lesson is as urgent today as it was two thousand years ago.

The call to humility is not merely a personal one; it extends into the very fabric of our communities. In Zambia and across the world, there are those who, like the tax collector, stand at a distance—excluded, ignored, burdened by their past. Do we, like the Pharisee, look down upon them? Or do we recognize in them our own need for grace? Catholic Social Teaching reminds us that true justice is not merely about external acts, but about an interior disposition that sees the dignity of every human person, especially the marginalized. The poor, the forgotten, the sinner—these are the ones whom God lifts up. And we are called not to stand apart from them, but to stand with them.

The Jesuit Blessed Rupert Mayer, whose feast is remembered in November but whose spirit speaks to us today, embodied this radical humility. A priest in Germany during the rise of Nazism, he did not seek to preserve his own reputation or safety. Instead, he stood with the persecuted, he spoke against injustice, and he spent time in prison for his faith. He did not boast of his righteousness,

but lived it in hidden acts of love and courage. His life echoes Hosea's words: "For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice; and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

So where do we stand? Do we come before God with a list of accomplishments, expecting His favor? Or do we stand like the tax collector, aware of our need, trusting only in His mercy?

As we continue our Lenten journey, let us reflect on these questions:

- Where in my life do I rely more on my own righteousness than on God's mercy?
- Who are the "tax collectors" of today—the people I am tempted to look down upon? How can I see them as God sees them?
- How can I cultivate a spirit of true humility, one that does not deny my gifts but recognizes that all is grace?

May we, like the tax collector, leave this place justified, not by our own merit, but by the boundless mercy of God.

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