**Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ**
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# 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Date:** Sunday, October 26, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
**First Reading:** Sirach 35:12–14, 16–18
**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 34:2–3, 17–19, 23 | **Response:** Psalm 34:7a
**Second Reading:** 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18
**Gospel Acclamation:** 2 Corinthians 5:19
**Gospel Reading:** Luke 18:9–14
**Preached at:** the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

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The readings today are about honest prayer and humble hearts. They show us that God listens to those who come before Him in truth, not in pride, and that His mercy always finds those who know they need it.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the Book of Sirach tells us that "the prayer of the humble pierces the clouds." These words were written when the people of Israel were under foreign rule, weary and waiting for justice. Ben Sira reminds them that God is not impressed by riches or power. He listens to the cry of the poor, the widow, and the orphan. Their prayers rise straight through the clouds until they reach God's heart.

That same truth is alive for us here in Zimbabwe. When a mother prays that her children will eat, when a young man prays for work, when a nurse prays for strength to care for the sick—those prayers do not vanish into the air. They pierce the clouds. God's mercy bends toward the humble, and His justice never forgets them.

The Gospel of Luke gives this truth a human face. Jesus tells of two men who go up to the temple to pray: a Pharisee and a tax collector. For Jesus' listeners, the Pharisee was not a villain. He was the religious man everyone admired—the one who prayed, fasted, and gave to the poor. Jewish law required only one fast a year, but this Pharisee fasted twice a week. He tithed on all he earned, perhaps out of a sincere desire to make reparation for others' sins, what the Jews called *tikkun olam*—the effort to "repair the world."

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The tax collector, by contrast, was seen as the worst kind of sinner: a man who collected taxes for the Romans and often cheated the poor to enrich himself. Everyone would have assumed that if one of these two men pleased God, it would be the Pharisee. Yet Jesus turns that expectation upside down. It is the tax collector, not the Pharisee, who goes home right with God.

What went wrong? The Pharisee's good works, which were meant to build up the community, became a means of building up his ego. His prayer was no longer about others or about God; it was about himself. He had turned religion into a competition—a way to prove his worth. His fasting and tithing, once acts of love, had become acts of self-promotion.

That temptation is not limited to him. We too can fall into the trap of thinking that our faith is about what we do for God rather than what God does for us. We can begin to measure our worth by comparing ourselves with others. We might even use another's weakness to feel better about ourselves. Whenever we do that, we have slipped into the Pharisee's prayer.

The tax collector, on the other hand, has nothing to show. He cannot list a single good deed. He simply whispers, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." He stands before God naked—without achievements, without excuses—and is loved. That is the Good News: we do not have to dress ourselves up to be acceptable to God. In fact, it is better if we come to Him as we truly are. God's love meets us not in our perfection but in our poverty.

The Gospel and the Book of Sirach together remind us that humble prayer opens the way to mercy, and that God's justice is especially attentive to those who know their need for Him.

The psalm today echoes that same truth: "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted." The psalmist speaks as someone who has suffered yet found God near. His prayer begins with gratitude and ends in trust. That is the heart of humility—it starts with thanksgiving and rests in God's presence.

St Augustine tells us that a bruised heart is not a sign of weakness but of truth: "The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and it will not rest until it reaches its goal." St Bernard of Clairvaux called humility "the first step of truth." When

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we face the truth about ourselves, we grow in compassion for others. In that honesty, God meets us with mercy, just as the psalmist declares, “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted” (Ps 34:18).

St Paul shows the same humility in his Second Letter to Timothy. He looks back on his life and says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Yet he adds, “The Lord stood by me and gave me strength.” Paul knows that his life has been carried by grace from beginning to end.

This is what Pope Francis means when he said, “We ought always to pray and not lose heart.” Humility and perseverance go hand in hand. A proud heart gives up when God seems silent; a humble heart keeps praying, trusting that He is listening.

Humility, then, is not only personal—it builds community. A proud society becomes divided, but humility builds bridges. When we see each other as brothers and sisters, all in need of mercy, we begin to shape a more just and caring nation. The prayer of the humble becomes action: feeding the hungry, caring for the widow, standing with the orphan, speaking truth with courage and gentleness.

St Ignatius of Loyola invites us to use our imagination in prayer. Picture the temple. Smell the incense, hear the quiet murmur of prayer. The Pharisee stands tall near the front; the tax collector stays at the back, head bowed, beating his chest. Where do you stand? What do you say to God?

Perhaps Jesus stands beside you, quietly inviting you to pray as the tax collector does—not to shame you, but to free you. “Come as you are,” He seems to say. “Bring Me your truth, not your trophies.”

Humility does not make us small—it makes space for grace. When we kneel before God, He does not push us down; He lifts us up. “All who humble themselves will be exalted,” says Jesus. That exaltation is not about praise or status—it is about being drawn into God’s own life, His peace, His love.

The saints knew this well. St Alfred the Great, whose feast sometimes falls near this Sunday, was a king yet humble of heart. He ruled with wisdom, prayed often, and saw leadership as service. True greatness is not about control but compassion, not about power but peace.

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So, brothers and sisters, as we go into this week, let us pray with humble hearts. Let us offer God not perfect words but honest ones. Let us bring to Him the bruised places of our lives. And let us remember the cries of those often unheard—the poor, the widow, the orphan, the unemployed, the sick—for when we join our voices with theirs, our prayer pierces the clouds.

And let us ask ourselves:

- When I pray, am I honest with God, or do I try to impress Him—or others?
- Where is God calling me to humility—in my family, my work, or my community?
- How can my prayer for the poor this week become concrete action for them?

The Lord still hears the prayer that pierces the clouds.
He still justifies the sinner who stands empty-handed before Him.
May we go in that same humility, trusting that God's mercy meets us where we are and sends us out to love as we have been loved.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.