

# SPIRITUAL LIFE

## Infected Spirituality

By: Sr. Mary Anne Seville, OSC

When I was young I always had the problem in distinguishing the two characters of today's Gospel: the Pharisee and the Publican. Who's the arrogant man and who the humble man? No matter how often we were told this parable, as kids we would confuse the two, until a clever catechist made it easy for us. She broke the two syllables on the Pharisee into "para", which in Spanish and Malay is the preposition meaning "to, for, towards", and the verb "see." So, a "para-see" would mean "for seeing, for show, for display, to be a show-off", like a Pharisee. So, if you know that the bad guy is the Pharisee then the other person, the Publican would be the good guy. Hmmm, that's easy to remember now.

"Jesus spoke this parable to those who believed in their own self-righteousness while holding everyone else in contempt." (Lk. 18:9) It is easy and convenient for us to identify ourselves with the meek and lowly publican. I should say we feel secure and proud of our humility. But let us beware, and let's look more closely, for ours might be nearer the profile of the arrogant and spiritually sick Pharisee, who thinks of himself as a holy man. Let's look at some of this spiritual virus and see how we can possibly wipe it clean.

-Wallowing in negative thinking. Such people love to drag up old painful events. Then they revel in the anger, resentment, or bitterness that cause such unhappy memories.

They believe that unhappiness should be very much part of one's spirituality, to imitate the sorrow of Christ. But now Christ has risen, and joy has been proclaimed. Stay away from such a gloomy spirit, in others or in yourself, that wants you to dive into some suffering over what happened yesterday. Never consent to stoop to resentments in life. Live in hope.

-Pulling ourselves up before the eyes of the world, we pull the others down. There are those who love to gossip, criticize, judge, or denigrate others in order to illustrate their supposed lofty state and privileges. They arrogantly pray "I give you thanks, O God, that I am not like the rest of men—grasping, crooked, adulterous, or even like this tax collector." (Lk. 18:11) Beware for "everyone who ex-

alts himself shall be humbled, while he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Lk. 18:14)

-Stay away from the spiritually sick people who thrive on announcing their glorious dream for the world but urge you to look down on it with contempt. They proclaim that only a few will be saved, and they condemn the rest of humanity. They express not pity and love but loathing for the sinful. The Lord seeks out the sinners, the lost sheep, and is not happy until he has found the "lost" and restored them to God's care.

-In their obsession for penance and suffering, these spiritual infected persons perpetuate ill in the human soul by resisting almost every gift that life offers. These so-called "Christians" want us to listen to their complaints, agree with their envy, and accept as right their rejection of life when it doesn't please them. We should be wise enough to recognize these chronically afflicted spirits, not to join their cynical and morbid party, and keep them from spreading this virus. Awareness of these subtle symptoms will help us change our spiritual strategies and help others change too. Remember, we change only when and if we wish to do so, acknowledging our pharisaic tendencies, because absolutely nothing can change us, until or unless we wish to change. Nor can we change other people, no matter what our motives may be or how much we love them, and believe the changes we wish to make in them are for the better.

What then are we to do when confronted with spiritually ill friends. Quite simply, love them for what they are and set an example with our own lives that will make them wish to change. Several wise people have stated that you must be the change you seek to find in your world. When we change ourselves to be the best we can be, and to conform to our rightful desires, we set an example for others. It is their choice to follow our example or not.

We suggest that rather than use your time and resources trying to change others, invest this time in changing yourself and you will be amazed at how the world around you pleasantly transforms itself before your eyes. With love, Pharisees and Publicans alike shall then be one entering the temple to worship their One true God.

Adopted from 'Sunday Examiner'

## READINGS OF THE WEEK

Sirach 35:12-18

2 Timothy 4:6-18

Luke 18:9-14

October 27, 2013

# 靈 修 生 活

## 請 先 排 隊

蔡 惠 民 神 父

聯合航空班機發生故障，服務人員必須協助旅客轉搭其他班機。櫃檯排滿了人，此時有一位先生擠到櫃檯前，將機票甩在櫃檯上說：「我要坐這班飛機的頭等艙！」服務小姐和氣地說：「親愛的先生，我很樂意為您服務，但麻煩他您去排隊。」此時，這位先生不耐煩地說：「看清楚！你知道我是誰嗎？」服務小姐拿起麥克風廣播：「各位旅客請注意，在十一號櫃檯前面，有一位先生不知道自己是誰，如果有那位旅客認識他，請聯絡聯合航空十一號櫃檯，謝謝！」當時，排隊在後面的旅客忍不住笑了起來。這位先生瞪著服務小姐，並嚴厲地說：「Fxx You！」服務小姐和氣微笑，回答說：「先生，那也要您先排隊才行！」

為甚麼故事中的乘客如此尷尬？為甚麼他不願意跟其他乘客一樣排隊等候服務？相信他認為坐頭等艙應該是獲得優先處理的。在耶穌的比喻中，法利塞人祈禱時的心態也十分相似：「天主，我感謝祢，因為我不像其他的人，勒索、不義、姦淫，也不像這個稅吏，我每週兩次禁食，凡我所得的，都捐獻十分之一。」(路十八 11-12) 言下之意，他認為自己應比其他入得到更好的待遇，這是他辛苦得來的回報。然而，耶穌提醒他，獲得天主垂青的，是另一個罪人而不是他，因為他根本沒有空間讓天主在他身上施恩。

一如今天的社會，法利塞人的生活圈子一向以學業成績、事業成就、法律持守或財富多寡，來釐定一個人的社會地位。因此，每個人自小便習慣追求這些成就，好能在激烈的競爭中，獨佔鰲頭、出人頭地。法利塞人以為天主也喜歡這一套，所以他在祈禱中一一列舉自己的功績，好獲得天主的垂青。殊不知他自以為是的自信和安全感，卻使天主無法接近他。當他認為自己每方面都完美無缺時，同時亦暗示自己是一個無暇可指，無需天主憐憫和寬恕的人。他將自己關在一個一無所缺的安樂窩裡，把天主和祂的禮物完全摒諸門外。與其說法利塞人向天主祈禱，倒不如說他是向自己獨白。

再者，人為了顯示自己比其他人更勝一籌，總喜歡拿其他人作比較。當其他人被比下去時，自己就好像高人一等。其實，這是逃避面對自己的軟弱，害怕接受自己的不濟。五個爛蘋果比十個爛蘋果好，只是一個自欺欺人的假象。不停將其他人比下去來抬舉自己，倒頭來只是浪費精力，因為天主是非常認識我們每一個人。矜持的自我形像反而阻礙了天主接近我們。

相反，比喻中的罪人表面上無可自誇，只是遠遠地站著，連舉目看天也不敢，但他一句簡單的說話：「天主，可憐我這個罪人罷！」(路十八 13) 卻讓天主有機會在他身上施恩。為那罪人來說，祈禱不是告訴天主自己的成就，也不是將一份巨細無遺的履歷交給天主；祈禱只是坦然面對和接納此刻的我。

耶穌講這個比喻的時候，相信保祿並不在場，但他肯定深刻體會法利塞人和罪人的分別。保祿曾經是一個出人頭地的宗教領袖，無論是工作、祈禱、法律持守，各方面都無暇可指，堪稱為義人。在迫害教會的行動上，他比其他人來得更積極和熱誠。他一向就是以此作為自己的人生目標，並以達到這目標為榮。「這場好仗，我已打完；這場賽跑，我已跑到終點；這信仰，我已保持了。」(格後四 7) 不過，他沒想到，他最終拿到的冠冕並不是來自他的努力，而是出自主耶穌的苦難和復活。從斐理伯人書中，我們可看到他的轉變：「凡以前對我有利益的事，我如今為了基督，都看作是損失。不但如此，而且我將一切都看作損失，因為我只以認識我主基督為至寶；為了祂，我自願損失一切，拿一切當廢物，為賺得基督，為結合於祂，並非籍我因守法律得的正義，而是籍由於信仰基督獲得的正義。」(斐三 7-9)

「凡高舉自己的必被貶抑；或貶抑自己的必被高舉。」(路十八 14) 讓我們想一下，天主面前的我，是無暇可指，抑或是無可自誇的？我們跟祂說話時，通常是理直氣壯的問：「為甚麼？」抑或是頭也抬不起的說：「天主，可憐我這個罪人罷！」

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