

Homily for October 26, 2025: Never look down!

Sirach 35: 12-17, Psalm 84: 1-6, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18, Luke 18: 9-14

A couple of weeks ago, an Indian friend invited me to attend a Hindu Diwali celebration. It was an amazing time: everyone was wearing beautiful, colorful clothes, there was a concert of dancing, singing, and poetry (I couldn't understand a word but it was still beautiful). Afterwards, everyone sat down for a feast of wonderful Indian food. There were several hundred people there and it was a truly joyous occasion. Diwali is known as the Festival of Lights, a celebration of the victory of light over darkness, of good over evil.

Diwali also marks the beginning of the new year in the Hindu calendar, representing a fresh start and a time for seeking forgiveness and making new resolutions. It's a time when people exchange gifts.

It seemed to me it was Christmas and Easter rolled into one glorious celebration.

Other religions that are close to Hinduism namely Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism share this holiday. The central theme for all of them is the triumph of good over evil, with different legends from each religion portraying how this victory was achieved.

So, I started looking at the other major religions in the world, and, as you probably already know, each one has a special occasion where people come together to seek forgiveness and renewal from their God and recommit

themselves to living in the Light with love and thankfulness.

There are millions of believers all around the world in these different faiths. So, whether in Diwali's light, or our Easter's resurrection celebration, in the Islamic Eid al-Fitr celebration at the end of Ramadan or Yom Kippur, or in Taoism's Lantern Festival, there is a moment when most of humanity pauses to remind themselves of the timeless moral imperative: to live with thankfulness, love, humility and care for others.

So how are we religious folk doing? As I look around, I don't see a lot of kindness or generosity towards the "others". Perhaps uneven progress.

Jesus speaks to this in today's parable. How seemingly very religious people can become misguided and fail to live up to that moral imperative.

Luke writes that Jesus told this parable to some who **trusted in themselves. And not in their God.** Through all their religiosity, they weren't seeking a relationship with God. They had it all under control, thank you very much. No help needed here. This description fits the Pharisee.

As a respected Jewish leader, he would have been living comfortably and when at the temple, he was the perfect example of faithfulness. He fasted, he tithed, and he obeyed all the religious laws.

But the Pharisee's prayer gives him away. "I thank God that I am not like those other people." This is not a prayer of gratitude or humility, but of comparison.

He is proud that he's done better than others. But he is only talking to himself, not to God. So he hadn't come to the temple seeking to meet with God and therefore he didn't. He went away empty.

His behavior might fit what the Book of Sirach describes as a "dishonest sacrifice".

But let's not be too hard on that Pharisee. We might recognize ourselves in him. We have worked hard to be successful in our lives and can rightly give ourselves some credit for that. Plus, we all work hard to do what's right – to live ethically, be generous and care for our neighbors. But sometimes, instead of all these things drawing us closer to God, they can build walls between us and others. We take too much pride in our own achievements. We measure, we compare, we judge.

It was ironic that this month, I was thinking about my pledge and the other ways I can help our community to thrive. I'll admit, I felt pretty chuffed that I could afford to increase my pledge a little this year.

So when I started thinking about my homily and read this passage, it was a good reminder to me that as we pray each week; "All things come of thee and of thine own are we giving thee". Thank you, Lord, that I can give back. And more than this, however great we might think we are doing, as Paul

writes: “We have all fallen short of the glory of God but are now justified by His Grace as a gift.” Only by His Grace. We can never make a case for our own goodness even when we try to improve it by comparison to someone less “good”.

So why do we sometimes lose sight of this? We start to think that our goodness will earn us favors – or that other’s failures make us look better. Why?

I have always been hypercritical of myself. I have always feel that I have to prove myself. Perhaps we all crave assurance that we are enough? So, comparison offers a quick comfort. When we look down on others, it gives us a momentary lift. We felt better about ourselves.

Perhaps, there’s something ingrained in our personality that makes us fall into these “Pharisee moments”?

Contrast all this with the behavior of the tax collector. He trusts in a higher power, in God and he prays only one line: God be merciful to me, a sinner. He doesn’t recite a list of accomplishments, he just brings an honest, repentant heart, trusting in God alone. This is the model of true faithfulness. And this is what God honors.

This parable reminds us that holiness is not about proving our worth but about opening our hearts. We are not in a competition.

When we remember how much God has forgiven in us, how can we ever look down on anyone. And yet... we still do, on occasion.

I can **still** fall into the same traps and beat myself up over it. It's just how I am.

I want to be like the psalmist today who wrote: Happy are the people whose strength is in you, whose hearts **are set on** the pilgrim's way. I want to be set consistently on the pilgrim's way – no negative thoughts. Is this possible?

Last week, I learned a new way to work on myself. It comes from Marian Budde, the bishop of Washington Cathedral who bravely and beautifully spoke the Gospel during the January Inauguration service. Last week, she joined with the Irish poet Padraig O'Tuama to give the 2025 Hogarth Lecture in New York city. It was a conversation on sanctuary, courage and belonging, based on the Story of Ruth in the OT. (I encourage you to find it on YouTube, it was terrific). Afterwards, someone asked her the very question that I am struggling with, this is basically how she responded:

“Befriend the part of us that is judgmental and petty. Surround it with love. Let that love push it down so you can see the good, loving parts of you. Don't be defined by it. Become it's guardian and put boundaries around it.

Remember that we are part of a story of redemption so seek the grace of God

to take that part of us and heal it.”

Wow! Sometimes, when I am physically sick, I have asked the Holy Spirit to flow through me and bring her healing. I value our monthly Healing Eucharist as a special time to pray for physical healing for ourselves and others. But I had not thought of inviting the Holy Spirit into my heart, into my thinking, in this way. I am trying it!

Perhaps if you, too, suffer from these “Pharisee moments”, you can relate to what I have been trying to say. Perhaps the grace of the Holy Spirit will help you too.

Let us pray:

Lord,

You see beyond our words and deeds to the truth of our hearts.

Help us to always remember how much You have given us and to look **up** to you in worship and gratitude and **out** to others with compassion. **Never down** on anyone.

Through the grace of Your Holy Spirit, help us to walk humbly, with love and thankfulness, always.

Amen.