

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time C

A few years back, I read a letter Pope Francis had received from teenager in Argentina named Nicholas, disabled from his birth. It's worth hearing in light of today's Scriptures.

“Dear Pope Francis: I am Nicolas and I am 16. I cannot write you (because I don't yet talk, and don't walk), so I've asked my parents to do so in my place. I would like to tell you that when I was 6 years old, Father Paul gave me my First Communion and this year, in November, I will be Confirmed, something that gives me great joy. Every night, since you asked us to pray for you, I ask my Guardian Angel – who is very patient – to guard and help you. Be sure that he does so very well because he takes care of me and is with me every day. And when I cannot sleep, he comes to play with me! I send you greetings and continue to ask my angel to help you and to give you strength. Your friend, NICO.”

The Pope commented: ***“In this boy's heart, there is beauty, love, the poetry of God. God who reveals himself to those who have a simple heart, to the little ones, the humble, those who we often consider the least. We know that the same Jesus we adore in the Eucharist, we also find in the most fragile brother or sister, from whom we learn that God loves those who are simple of heart.”***

On World Mission Sunday, it is good for us to recall the last words of Jesus to His Apostles before His return to the Father: “Go into the whole world and tell the Good News.” That is why the Church exists, to invite all to know the mercy of God fully revealed in Jesus Christ. We are here precisely because others before us have heard, accepted, and shared the Gospel. Like the Apostles, we are chosen to know Jesus and then to be sent out, so that every heart, and especially hearts like Nicholas, can find hope and a peace the world cannot give.

The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds, Sirach says. But lowliness is not found only in our physical or personal limitations; ***it is rather an attitude of the heart***, and Jesus draws the clear contrast of attitudes in this parable. The group we call the “Pharisees” were known in Hebrew as the ***Perushim*** – literally, the

“separate ones.” Originally, they were separate in a positive sense – they *stood out* for their SINCERITY and their desire to follow God’s law whole-heartedly, separating themselves from whatever would compromise their covenant with God. But over time, they became “separate” in a different way – separate from “the rest of humanity,” as Jesus puts it, holding themselves apart with disdain and scorn from those they viewed as unworthy.

Jesus does not criticize the Pharisee in the parable for his religious practices ... indeed, he was doing more than the Jewish law would have required. The problem is his self-righteousness, his attitude of contempt for the tax collector. Instead of opening him up to God, his smug prayer in fact closes him off, proud of his own achievements and blind to the humanity of another. In contrast, the tax collector knew he had nothing to offer God but his plea for mercy. His prayer was spoken from his humbled conscience, aware of his need for undeserved forgiveness. HIS prayer pierced the clouds, spoken from a lowly heart.

Jesus first humbled Himself, accepting our human condition and even death on a Cross. He continues to humble Himself, coming to us so faithfully in the Eucharist. As CS Lewis put it so well, to be humble does not mean to think less of myself; it is simply to think of myself less. This week, find a way or two to take the lower place and allow another to be first. For this we are chosen, for this we are sent. In humility, our prayers pierce the clouds that dull our hopes, and like Nicholas, we reach the heart of the merciful God.