

**Monsignor Dennis Sheehan**  
**Homily Given on October 24, 2010**  
**Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Liturgical Year C**

Two souls prayed that morning in the parish church. Here's the prayer of the first. He was in church every Sunday, gave generously, was a member of the Parish Council, and said the rosary. He prayed:

*"I may have told a white lie, but I never cheated on my taxes. Thank God. I may steal now and again, but I've never killed anyone. Thank God. I may have turned away from a street person's plea, but I'm not responsible for starvation in Haiti. Thank God."*

So it goes. The Pharisee in today's Gospel is not a bad guy. He's a committed member of the faith community, and what he says about his virtues is probably true.

But Jesus makes one thing clear today. Using others to measure our own virtue is dangerous. Not least, that approach uses God to drive a wedge between me and other people. A story from Islam: A man came one day to Mohammed to complain. "Master, my six brothers are all asleep. I alone have stayed awake to worship Allah." Mohammed replies, "You, too, are better off asleep if your worship is made up only of assessing your brothers."

The other fellow in church is different. He's a drunk or a drug addict. He can barely get his act together to stand up. So he slouches and slurs. "God help me" is the best he can say.

Somehow though, he's got it right. You see, in God's eyes, we all need mercy. Our moral living counts for something. Sure it does. To live as God wills is certainly better than not to live that way.

But when we stand in God's presence – when we stand at the foot of the cross – when we are in the presence of the one who is all holy – then we are all equal. We all need to begin with a prayer for mercy. If the Pharisee were standing before his peers, his list of achievements might have counted. But Jesus reminds us that he was standing before God – and he forgot his need for mercy.

The Hapsburgs were the Emperors of Austria before World War I. When the Emperor died, his retainers brought his body to the door of the church. They knocked, and the priest inquired, "Who needs admission here?" "His apostolic majesty, the Emperor." "I don't know him," the priest replied. Again a knock. Again the question. "The highest emperor," they answered. "I do not know him." A third knock. The mourners this time replied, "A poor sinner, your brother," and the procession entered.

May we be virtuous like the Pharisee and humble as the tax collector, for all of us stand before the God of mercy and compassion. Together, we give thanks to the Lord our God.