

Homily for the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 26-27, 2019

Readings: Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

Preacher: Irene Goodwin

At the British surrender at Yorktown a drinking song was sung by the soldiers. The words were: "The world turned upside down, the world turned upside down." Today, we consider the American Revolution as a turning point for the world. In Luke's Gospel we read about Jesus turning the world upside down.

It begins when we read Mary's Magnificat, where a poor, unwed pregnant girl rejoices that the hungry will be filled and the rich sent away empty. It continues with Jesus reading from the prophet Isaiah. Jesus then proclaims that the reading is fulfilled in their midst. The blind will see, the lame will walk and prisoners will go free. It is not as if these are new ideas in the New Testament. It is a theme of many of the prophets.

Our First Reading today from Sirach tells us that God has no favorites. However, God does have an affinity for the poor, widows and orphans. What is different is that Jesus walked the earth and gave us examples of turning the world upside down. Pharisees were religious men who were well respected. Tax collectors were sinners working for Rome and were known to take a little extra for themselves. Yet Jesus praised the tax collector and condemned the Pharisee. We know that Jesus will tell us that there is more joy over one repentant sinner. Are we being told to go sin and then ask for repentance?

Perhaps today's reading is about the attitude of the Pharisee and the tax collector, which shows up in their prayer. The Pharisee stands off by himself, we hear his prayer. He needs no one, not even God. The Pharisee is self-absorbed. The tax collector also stands alone; however, his prayer is a total dependence on God. In order to be a part of turning the world, we need to depend on God.

Are we being told that in order to make a difference, we must turn to God in prayer with humility? I remember a story. Three ministers were having a conversation about prayer. One said he prayed best on his knees. Another said she prayed best standing with hands raised. The last one said she prayed best

laying prostrate. A telephone repair person overheard them and said, “I pray best hanging off a pole by one leg.” Perhaps when we are most in need is when our prayer is the most humble.

When we are not full of ourselves it is easier to make room for God. Fr. Ronald Rolheiser writes that when we are young there is a time for some self-absorption. This is the time when we prepare ourselves to be adults in the world. At some point we need to look beyond our own needs to the needs of others. He also warns us that we may also be doing very good things for other people and not be humble about it. Like the Pharisee in the middle of our good deeds, we can be full of ourselves. Aren't we great? Look at all the good we are doing! Look at that person—he does nothing for others.

It seems humility may even pay off in the business world. In a March 2015 *Forbes* article, Jeff Boss writes about 15 traits of humble people. What he stresses is being aware of the other. Always remember to take time to notice what is happening for and to others. Humble people listen and put the other first in our conversation. He says that when people listen and know when to ask for help, they can make decisions easily because they put the other first.

In a world where getting ahead and wealth are so important, it may be difficult to find stories of humility. However, they are present in our everyday life. It may be as simple as the person who lets us go ahead of them in the grocery line or gives you a seat on a crowded bus. Family members sacrifice and put themselves second for their children or for aging parents. I remember a woman who every day went to the nursing home to feed her mother-in-law. Her husband had been dead many years, yet she made a commitment to feed his mother.

Today I ask myself, what my prayers tell me about myself and my relationship with God and others. Am I always focused on myself or do I listen. Perhaps, if I empty myself, take time to listen, I might hear how God is asking me to turn my small world upside down.