



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

How many times do we look for short cuts in our lives? Our short cuts too often keep us from becoming the best version of ourselves, and keep us from growing in relationship with God and others. I bring this up because of the chaos of my week, I thought I might take a short-cut in writing my article. I confess that I went back to the previous three articles I wrote for this weekend (2013, 2016, 2019) to see if I could steal those and repost with no one noticing. But as I looked at them, none of them could really be used for where we are today. [Sigh...]

It did get me thinking, though, about external versus internal. We so often try to put on a good front for everyone to see, dreading for anyone to see the "real me," lest the real me be rejected in my brokenness. Yet we need real acceptance. We all want to be loved, but if we aren't known and seen for who we really are, then we won't really be loved... only our façade will be loved. So, we're in this dilemma – If I show my real self and am rejected, I will be devastated, so I show only the good and acceptable sides of myself, my personality, etc., so that I will be accepted... but, then, all acceptance I receive is not really acceptance of me but of my persona I put on. Ugh!

I think this may be at work with the parable in today's Gospel. Both the Pharisee and the tax collector need to be loved and accepted – for they are human; it is a core need built into us. The Pharisee has developed an active external persona in order to be acceptable to others, to God and to himself:

**O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.** (Luke 18:11-12)

He desperately needs to be accepted, and so has assumed external observances to make himself acceptable.

The Tax Collector, on the other hand, is brutally honest with himself. He knows he has betrayed his people. He has most likely betrayed his God in many ways. Who knows what brought him to the Temple that day. Whatever it was, it was something stirring up in his heart showing him how far he had fallen from God. In his brokenness, all the masks came off. He did not try to be someone he was not. He knew that if God did not accept him in his fallenness, there was no hope for being accepted and loved by anyone, anytime.

**The tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'** (Luke 18:13)

And he went home justified – in right relationship with God. God accepted him as he was.

This is the mercy of God. He loves us where we are. He accepts us where we are. We are known to the depths of our souls and He still loves us. What made the tax collector able to receive the love of God was his repentance and contrition – he was sorry for his sin and knew he needed mercy. When we pretend (and isn't there so much pretending today... just look at Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok!), we end up only with fake love, fake intimacy, fake acceptance. But when we allow ourselves to be real with God, really broken, really in need of forgiveness ... we receive real acceptance, real love, real mercy.