

In today's Gospel, Luke 18:10-14, we read about the parable of two men; one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee prayed thanking God that he is not like those who are sinners such as the tax collector. He proclaims that he fasts and tithes. The tax collector couldn't even lift his eyes to heaven, and prayed for God to be merciful to him for he is a sinner. In this parable it is the tax collector who the Lord finds justified, "for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Pharisees at that time strictly observed the rites and ceremonies of the Torah both in written and oral tradition. So what really was the issue with what the Pharisee did so that we may learn from it? Is it wrong to fast? Is it wrong to donate? He was obviously a devout person.

Dearest ones of God, the Pharisee was poor in spirit. As such, he was egocentric and only looked to himself and was unable to recognize the other, or God as the All Merciful. It was difficult for him to understand that we live our lives in synergy with both God and our neighbors.

Are we sometimes like the Pharisee in this parable? Do we attend the Divine Liturgy and then boast of ourselves looking down at others? Let us begin this Triodion with opening our hearts to one another and to God so that we may like the tax collector, the Publican, ask God to be merciful to us as sinners. May God's will be done; in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever and ever, amen.

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee is the first Sunday of a three-week period prior to the commencement of Great Lent. It marks the beginning of a time of preparation for the spiritual journey of Lent, a time for Orthodox Christians to draw closer to God through worship, prayer, fasting, and acts of charity. Learn more by visiting:

<http://lent.goarch.org/publicanpharisee/learn/>