

Lent Devotional March 5, 2025

Scripture

Luke 18:9-14

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

Devotion

The Rev. Dr. Steve Shussett '93

With Ash Wednesday beginning the forty days of Lent, many Christians undertake a spiritual discipline to connect with Jesus' time in the desert. This can mean prayer practices that take them out of their comfort zone, just as Jesus was taken out of his. Perhaps fasting from a favorite food, or more intentional devotional reading.

But what if you could pray just as meaningfully by simply remembering who God is and who you are? Instead of avoiding alcohol or reading a long book, you can just repeat a twelve-word phrase. From a handful of verses comes a handful of words that have changed the lives of many, particularly, but not only, of our Orthodox siblings.

Jesus' parable tells of a Pharisee celebrating his own goodness, crowning his self-congratulatory prayer by thanking God that he isn't like other people. Meanwhile, a nearby tax collector beats his chest, begging God to show him mercy.

This parable is at the core of the Jesus Prayer, frequently prayed as "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." A repetition of twelve words that acknowledge who Jesus is, who we are, and what we desperately need.

Unlike more challenging spiritual disciplines, this simple prayer is like the widow's two mites: few words spoken faithfully that mean so much. An experienced practitioner might pray this hundreds or thousands of times daily, until it is prayed with every heartbeat, as in *The Way of a Pilgrim*.

You're not there. But starting today, you might get one step closer. Begin hourly, and increase day by day, until it becomes a more natural impulse. Anytime, especially when your mind wanders to where angels fear to tread, these twelve little words are a faithful response to our God who in Christ first reached out to you.

Prayer

"Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Jesus, I can't begin to understand your depths, but you know me better than I know myself, and still you show me mercy. May I know myself and every sibling as a sinner, yes, but forgiven all the more. Amen.