



“O Lord, You have condemned the Pharisee who justified himself by boasting of his works, and You have justified the Publican who humbled himself and with cries of sorrow begged for mercy. For You reject proud-minded thoughts, but You do not despise a contrite heart. Therefore, in meekness we kneel before You Who suffered for our sake. Grant us forgiveness and great mercy.”

Matins for the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee

The Second Pre-Greatfast Sunday

Sister Seraphim Olsafsky

“Brethren, let us not pray as the Pharisee, for he who exalts himself shall be humbled. Let us humble ourselves before God, and with fasting cry aloud as the Publican: ‘O God, be merciful to us sinners.’ ”

Vespers for the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee

One of the ways of looking at our life cycle is to refer to it as the journey inward, the call to come home to myself, to a self that is most truly the one designed by a loving Father. To allow my deepest self to emerge is the task of my lifetime. Its emergence is slow and rhythmical as the unfolding of a flower.

The first step of my self’s unfolding is the acceptance of the truth about myself and the living of it according to reality. To acknowledge both the bad as well as the good about myself is to be an authentic person. When we do not want to face the truth of who we are, we become a stranger to ourselves and to others. We wear a mask and we attempt to be other than the unique person God has called us to be.

And it is in the wearing of a mask that I become a hypocrite—“Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, play actors that you are... you appear like good persons on the outside but inside you are a mass of pretense and wickedness.” (*Matthew 23:13-28*).

To sustain my mask before others takes much energy. One clever way to maintain my mask and to avoid seeing myself as I am is to continuously compare my actions with the actions of those persons whom I consider less than myself. And into what a clever trap I have fallen, for I will always find someone whose outward actions appear to fall short of mine. I will constantly be looking outward toward others and never inward at the movements of my own heart. I will have taken upon myself the heart of the Pharisee, puffed up with emptiness, judgmental and condemning, while thanking God that I am not like another. I will have taken upon myself the heart of the Pharisee, but because of my mask, I will only know myself as the Publican.

On this second pre-greatfast Sunday, our Byzantine Catholic Church poses the question: “How can I come out from my mask?” The theme of this Sunday is humility, the second requisite for repentance after desire. In humility, I must try to look at the unpleasant facts of my life. Then I can free myself of the slavery to my mask and experience true personal encounters with my neighbor and with God.

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 18:10-14