

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, C

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Christ within me see and honor the Christ within you, and the Christ within you see and honor the Christ within me.

What if that was our expectation every time we met someone? What if that was the foundation for our marriages, parenting, and friendships? What if that was our intention when we had those hard conversations and dealt with those difficult people in our lives? What if we recognized that God resides in all people, regardless of who they are, and we honored them for that and treated them with the same reverence we give God? How would that change us? What would it ask of us? What might it do for our relationships? What difference would that make in the world?

Maybe it would begin to heal us of our Pharisaism. When I say Pharisaism, I am not talking about the Jewish people or Judaism. I am talking about the human tendency to narrow our thinking and being into just one right way, my way.

Pharisaism is not about a particular people or a particular religious tradition. It is the human condition that infects all people and all religious traditions. It is as real today as it was in Jesus' day. It deceives us into trusting in ourselves, seeing ourselves as righteous, and regarding others with contempt.

When I play the Pharisee, the one right way is always my way, my religion's way, my culture's way. It is my way or the highway. But what

about God's way? What about the way Christ showed us? I cannot claim to be a faithful follower of Jesus while continuing to do it my way.

Pharisaism is the mother of profiling. Profiling happens when I look at the outside of another human being and draw conclusions and judgments about their insides. Looking through the lens of my way, I take his or her appearance, accent, actions and behaviors, lifestyle, faith, beliefs and practices, and make conclusions and judgments about his or her value, dignity, motives and desires, intelligence and abilities, holiness and goodness.

Those conclusions and judgments are always in my favor and against the other. Isn't that what the Pharisee is doing to the tax collector in today's gospel? **“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.”** Thank you for not being like them and for doing it the right way. The truth is, we all have some **“thems”** in our lives.

The Pharisee sees only the outside of the tax collector. He has no idea about that man's fears and hopes, his dreams and aspirations, his pain and struggles. He has no idea that he and the tax collector just might be more alike than he knows or wants to believe.

Even as I make those statements about the Pharisee in today's gospel, I recognize that I am doing to the Pharisee what he is doing to the tax

collector. I remember myself in the Pharisee and the Pharisee in me. What about you? Have you ever been a Pharisee? Ever profiled another?

Pharisaic profiling separates us from the other. We stand by ourselves. We raise ourselves and put others down. We make ourselves more and the other less. At some level, even if we are in denial, we know that is what we are doing. Would you be happy if your children, spouse, or parents received that kind of treatment? Would you want to be seen and treated the way you see and treat your worst enemy?

You don't want that for yourself or your family? I don't either. So why is it ok for others to be treated that way, but not for us? There is only one answer to that question. It is not. It is not ok, but Pharisaism deceives us into believing that it is. That's the lie Pharisaism tells. That's the lie too many of us have bought into and live with. And it has, far too often, convinced us that it is better to be right than to do what is right. And if we are being honest, most of us know the right thing to do.

The lie that Pharisaism tells lives in the darkness of our fears. We fear the stranger, the other. We fear being powerless. We fear our lives and world are spinning out of control. We fear that which is different and unknown. We fear losing our place in society. We fear there is not enough to go around and that whatever another gains is my loss. We fear not being enough. We fear intimacy and being vulnerable. We fear being hurt. We fear seeing ourselves in the other. We fear facing ourselves and the truth of our lives.

We fear, and then we profile. We stand by ourselves, looking at others through the lens of our own way, trusting in ourselves that we are righteous, and regarding others with contempt. But what if there is another way? What if we could stand outside ourselves and in the life of another? What if we could see and experience the other's life and world as he or she sees and experiences it?

What if we threw out the profile and wondered? No conclusion or judgments, just wondering?

- I wonder what untold story lives behind the face, words, actions, and circumstances of his or her life?
- I wonder what it is like to stand in their shoes, to see with their eyes, to face their fears, to struggle with their needs and desires, to live with their memories, to feel with their heart?
- I wonder what I would see, feel, do, and say if that were me and my life?

Or, better yet, instead of wondering, we could ask them to tell us their story. What are your dreams? What do you fear? What are your joys and sorrows? Where does it hurt? What do you need? What do you want for your life and your family? I suspect we would recognize many of their answers as our own.

If I opened myself to the life of another in those ways, if I truly identified with the other at a deep interior level, if I loved the other as myself, if I allowed the Christ in me to see and honor the Christ in her or

him, would I still stand off by myself, thanking God that I am not like them? No. I don't think I could do that, and I don't think you could either. Instead, our hearts would break for them, our eyes would weep with compassion for them, our heads would nod with understanding and in solidarity with them, and our hands would reach out to our brother or sister.

That's exactly what God is doing in Jesus. In Jesus, God chose to stand outside God's self and in human life, to see with our eyes, to feel with our hands, to love with our hearts. Are we unwilling to do that for each other? In Christ God not only lives and experiences human life but invites humanity to live and experience divine life. He asks us to stand outside ourselves and in the life of another.

The Pharisee in today's gospel isn't a bad guy. He is not wrong or worse than the tax collector. He is afraid. He is afraid to face the truth of his own life. So, he justifies himself. The tax collector, however, faces the truth about himself, and he alone goes home justified. In facing the reality of our lives, we open ourselves to see and honor the truth of another's life.

That's the work God has given us to do, and it is some of the most challenging jobs we have ever done. And yet, I know you can do it. I have watched you do it. I have experienced your compassion. I have been moved and inspired by the ways you have reached out to others. That's a choice we make every time we encounter another human being, whether

it is a family member, friend, stranger, or enemy. It is a choice we will make when we leave here today, having been told, **“Go in peace.”**

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Christ within me see and honor the Christ within you, and the Christ within you see and honor the Christ within me. **Amen.**