PHARISEES AMONG TRADITIONAL CATHOLICS

Bp. Michał Stobnicki

Dear faithful, on this tenth Sunday after Pentecost we hear from the lips of Our Lord Jesus another parable. A parable, that is, an invented story, an abstract story, a story that is, as it were, an illustration, meant to help us understand God's law, meant to help us understand what we must do in order to fulfil the will of God. And indeed, when we listen to the various parables that we find in the pages of the Gospel, thoughts may arise in our minds that bring consolation or else terror. For when we listen to parables, we realise that these stories are reality, that Jesus is speaking about us. And so what might seem to be something that does not really happen, really does happen in our lives.

And today Christ the Lord sets before our eyes two men who come to the temple to pray. But as it turns out, only one of them comes to pray.

First Christ the Lord sets before our eyes the Pharisee. A Pharisee who by his very outward bearing, by the fact that he enters the temple self-assured and proud and goes up to the altar, already shows by that bearing that in truth he holds God in contempt. And a moment later we hear his prayer, his so-called prayer, which begins with thanksgiving for the fact that his comparing himself, so very often, with other people allows him to draw the conclusion that he is a good man. The Pharisee is very pleased with himself. And God is of no use to him whatsoever. He does not come today to give God honour, to thank Him, to ask, to beg pardon for his sins. The Pharisee comes to the temple in order to give honour to himself, to be delighted with what a good man he is. In this so-called prayer of his there is no room at all for God. It is no prayer whatsoever, for prayer is the raising of the mind to God. And the Pharisee needs God for nothing. God, prayer, pseudo-prayer are for him a toy, meant to serve his self-satisfaction.

PHARISEES AMONG US

Dear faithful, with dismay we must state that there is no lack of these Pharisees among Catholics, among traditional Catholics too. There is no lack of them, my dear brethren, and you have certainly experienced it in your life already. People who have God on their lips, who seem to be pious, religious, but who in their very essence are not so at all. The virtue of religion is directed to God, and they have put themselves in God's place. People who have loved themselves above all things and who try to powder over their self-love with pseudo-piety. People who can, even for long years of their lives, pretend to be religious people, but who in their very essence have not much to do with God. People who go to the little church to Mass, and it is a bit like collecting points at Orlen [a Polish petrol station chain]. As long as there are plenty, thick and fast, but what the quality is, no one bothers about that any more. Just so long as it is ticked off. People who go to church for Mass to show themselves to others, so that others will think well of me: how pious, how prayerful. People who come to church for Mass in order to feel good themselves: what a good Catholic I am. He prays beneath the statue, and has the devil under his skin. A wise man does not need to seem wise. A pious man, a holy man, does not need to seem pious and holy.

THE PUBLICAN

How greatly the figure of the publican contrasts with the bearing of the Pharisee. The publican, who beats his breast, does not dare even to lift his eyes to heaven, and begs God's pardon for his sins. The publican, who comes in order to give honour to God, comes in order to acknowledge his wretchedness, his sinfulness. The publican, who was treated with contempt by the other Jews, but it is he, my dear brethren, despised, rejected, who is justified, who obtains forgiveness of sin, because he truly came to the temple to pray, to raise his thoughts to God, to bow down before Him, to ask for atonement, for the forgiveness of

his sins.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

This, my dear brethren, is today's Sunday. The parable we have heard is for all of us a call to an examination of conscience. What is my piety like? Why do I go to church? Why do I pray? Is it not the case that I pray in order to give honour to myself, to feel good, so that others will think well of me? Is it not the case, my dear brethren, that too often we are simply egoists, forgetting what it is all for: why the Catholic Church, why the Mass, why prayer? Is there still room for God in my prayer, or perhaps I drove Him out long ago? Do I pray for the eye of men or for my own good feeling?

How many present-day Catholics, both post-conciliar and traditional, have made God, the Mass, prayer into a toy? The alcoholic reaches for alcohol so that he may feel good, the drug addict for drugs, and not a few of the pseudo-pious for a prayer which is a pseudo-prayer, which is empty because there is no God in it. Prayer without God makes no sense at all.

A priest from France, ordained in 1980 by Archbishop Lefebvre, who visited me not long ago, Father Pivert [?], says that among Catholics there is a whole mass of those who go to Holy Mass, who want Mass, *la messe pour la messe*: Mass for Mass's sake. Just like that collecting of points at Orlen: ticked off, so it is good, so it is fine. But what lies behind all this? Do I understand that it is my duty to give honour to God? I, a creature, have duties toward God. I have duties. Not only rights. Not only rights, as we are taught today: human rights, children's rights, animal rights. Everyone has nothing but rights, and no one has any duties.

IMITATING THE PUBLICAN

Let us, my dear brethren, make an examination of conscience. May we never become imitators of the Pharisee, may we never come to the Church of God in order to boast what good people we are. For each of us surely still lacks a great deal of holiness, the preacher included. Let us come to the Church of God and imitate the example of the publican. Let us beat our breasts. Let us ask forgiveness for our faults, errors, sins. He who works on the virtue of piety sees his own weaknesses better and better. Christ the Lord speaks to us through the Gospel in order to enlighten us, to make us realise what we are really like, not what we would like to be or what we think we are, but what we really are.

Let us take today's Gospel as a warning. This story, my dear brethren, happens for real every day all over the world and concerns every man without exception. Do I give honour to the true God? Have I made myself my own god? Why do I pray? Why do I come to Holy Mass? Is it one more toy, meant to improve my mood, to make me feel that I am a good man?

Saint John Mary Vianney, the great French saint, said that he asked God that he might feel no spiritual consolation from offering Holy Mass. And why? Because he would be afraid that he would begin to offer Holy Mass for the sake of the joy, the consolation which he receives at the altar, and not because it is his duty. So the saint said. So greatly did he fear himself. So greatly did he fear this self-satisfaction with what we do. May we never fall into it. May we always, my dear brethren, keep this criticism, a healthy criticism, toward everything we do, everything we say. May we never live in the conviction that we are the wisest, the most faithful to God, the most pious, for each of us still lacks a great deal of holiness.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Praised be Jesus Christ. Amen.