

October 17, 2025

Daily Reflections



WHO'S THE PHARISEE?

By Father David Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from the Epistle to the Romans and the Gospel of Luke

All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as an expiation, through faith, by his Blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed, through the forbearance of God – to prove his righteousness in the present time, that he might be righteous.... We consider that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Does God belong to Jews alone? Does he not belong to Gentiles, too? Yes, also to Gentiles, for God is one and will justify the circumcised on the basis of faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

ROMANS 3:23-26, 28-30

“Woe to you, scholars of the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves did not enter and you stopped those trying to enter.”

Reflection

On the 15th of October, we celebrated the memory of one of the most profound Catholic saints, Saint Teresa of Avila, a 16th century mystic, who, at 39 years of age (after nearly 20 years as a Carmelite nun), experienced a life-changing series of visions of the love of Jesus that altered her spiritual identity forever. The fruit of these revelations led to the reformation of her Carmelite community, and teachings that have helped shape Catholic mystical theology for centuries. An oft-repeated quotation embodies her central understanding: **The important thing is not to think much but to love much; and so do that which best stirs you to love.** As a Doctor of the Church, her intellectual prowess is without question, but for her, love was always paramount in every time and place, in every encounter and endeavor.

Yesterday's readings immersed us firmly in the agonizing conflicts between Pharisees and Christians, and even among the leaders themselves. Paul continuously chastises the dogmatic postures that placed acts of the Law over the saving power of faith, the cornerstone of his understanding of the Christian life. Jesus does likewise when he says: **Woe to you, scholars of the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves did not enter and you stopped those trying to enter.** He knows that dictates and dogmas do not lead to intimacy with God. Humble surrender in faith, and abiding hope in divine mercy, are the heartbeat of his message to all seeking life's fulfillment in their religious knowing and living. Forgiveness is an essential fruit of this redeeming path.

In the state of public life which now disrupts our days, filled with mutual disdain and vicious political strategies, we often find ourselves perched on a great divide in which both factions claim religious, social, and cultural warrant for their divergent ideologies. This divide is marked by self-righteousness and polemics about 'those people.' Our deep Christian roots in mercy and forgiveness are shriveled by our often-desperate efforts to find a way to 'win.' We stand at such a great distance from Teresa's maxim to "**do that which best stirs you to love.**" How do we find a path forward?

In recent months, in my preaching and writing, I find myself focusing on two spiritual practices—gratitude and a spirit of reconciliation. To be truthful, my rhetorical energy has often outstripped my inner conviction! In more recent days, as I gave more attention to self-care (enough sleep, space to tone down my mental busyness, etc.), I discovered to my surprise, I woke up in the

morning with a quite natural tendency to spontaneously say “Thank you,” without any formal context or action. It occurred often enough that I became conscious of the inner quiet in which I could offer this simple acknowledgment to God. It wasn’t an ‘answer’ to anything, but simply a space in which I could experience thankfulness in the details of life—doing that which might stir me to love!

The notion of reconciliation or forgiveness has been quite another matter! When I observe others manipulating or outright injuring others who have nowhere to turn, my sense of justice takes on a biting edge. I know that forgiveness is not a spiritual universal that descends like a divine shower. I often do not even long to find the spirit to work toward reconciliation. St. Ignatius proposed an ingenious practice to move forward within. He taught that we can pray for “*the desire for the desire.*” Since our emotional center can be so blunted by anger and judgment (however warranted in the abstract!), we may not feel capable of ever reaching a merciful balance. If we pray for the ‘desire for the desire,’ we are simply giving voice to a deep yearning most have—to be more like Christ in our vision of the world and its inhabitants. This is not passivity, or acquiescing to what is. Rather, it is a moment in prayer in which we acknowledge the limitations in our person to meet the other from a place of hope, not condemnation. This allows us a haven in which we can plant a seed of desire that might blossom into a deeper knowledge of how to love like God—in truth, but with a vision of possibility, rather than surrender to mere dismissal of the other.

I cannot offer any guarantee that this is a one-size-fits-all for spiritual freedom. I can only pray that each of us, in a world of rampant separation, can find the place of stillness that Jesus always sought, where prayer and unity with the fulfilling presence of our God can help us to shape a more humane future for all.



The Sanhedrin Gathered
Image Created by David Robinson, S.J.

For Pondering

- Have you discovered a spiritual space within where you can abide in God's vision for peace in your life?
 - Do you have a community connection where you can share your inner desires for a more respectful and compassionate society?
 - Are there specific actions/prayers/rituals that help you find a way to center in the midst of anger or disrespect?
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