

30th Sunday (C)

- As a child, I used to spend about 2 weeks of my summer holidays with friends on their farm in Trentham where they cultivated potatoes & raised chickens before the time of battery farming of fowl.
- I gained an appreciation of the hard labour, but also of the simplicity of people involved in farming & agriculture – I found them to be friendly, hospitable, kind & ready to help each other out.
- There's something very wholesome about people who've grown up on the land; they're close to the cycle of nature & to the soil itself & understand that their very livelihood is determined by nature that is not in their control.
- We can also learn much from our First Nation people & their connection to the land - the health of land & water is central to their culture; land is their mother, is steeped in their culture, but also gives them the responsibility to care for it.
- The Latin word for soil is 'humus', which gives us the word humble.
- Country people often exemplify what true humility is; they are generally down-to-earth sort of people, & you could say that they've got their feet firmly planted on the ground.
- What do we find attractive about humble people, like the tax-collector in our parable today? I'd suggest at least three things.
- Firstly, they seem to be very much at home with themselves; they tend to understand themselves well, & are aware of their gifts & shortcomings; of their place within family & society & they are honest with themselves; they can see the funny side of life, & don't take themselves too seriously.
- We like being with them, & feel good about ourselves in their company.
- They seem to have time for others in a world where so many people lead such demanding, active & full lives that they run their lives according to their diaries & have little time for others not part of their agenda in life.
- Our tax-collector had a challenging & unpopular job; he would not have been proud of all that he'd done, but he seems to accept life as it is; he opens his heart to God, & leaves everything to God's mercy - & we warm to his humble self-acceptance.
- Secondly, humble people are generally able to count their blessings.
- They don't compare themselves to others, nor do they hanker after material possessions; they seem content with their lot in life, & find enjoyment in the simple pleasures of each day; and even when times are tough they can still find much for which they can be grateful.
- Modern life, which has so much focus on rights & entitlements, has led many people to having high expectations of professionals & resorting to confrontation when these are not met.
- They are super conscious of OH&S issues, & of safeguarding themselves from possible litigation - Life has really become so complex.

- How refreshing to spend time with humble people, who always have time for you, & always look on the bright side of life.
- I would be sure that our tax-collector would think of himself as blessed in life, & would not hesitate even to strike up a conversation with our Pharisee.
- Thirdly, humble, down-to-earth people are very accepting of their bodily life & its functions as natural & good.
- Down-to-earth people are people of the Incarnation; they find it so natural to change nappies, attend to the sick, & comfort those in distress.
- They generally don't have too many body-image problems, they accept the ageing process as it occurs, & are at home with their sexuality.
- Humble people are a real tonic to the system, & help us see through the artificial world of advertising where we are constantly being invited to purchase some new product to enhance our appearance or personality.
- For far too long we have thought humility meant putting ourselves down, pretending we were nobodies, worthy of nothing.
- This is not Christian humility - being humble does not mean we hide or minimise our God-given gifts, talents or resources.
- It means we honour others by sharing them, enabling them to benefit from the goodness of God that can be expressed through them.
- Our tax-collector probably had his share of blood, sweat & tears - in contrast to the 'pious' Pharisee, who seems locked up in his disengaged & somewhat antiseptic 'spiritual' world.
- The Pharisee typifies the wrong attitude - he is self-focused & self-reliant; he is standing by himself; he sees himself as pure & is determined not to allow his purity to be in any way tainted by mixing with the community since, in his judgment, they are sinners & less than him.
- He is not actually praying; his attention is not on God but on himself.
- He thinks he is speaking to God, but he is speaking to himself.
- He thinks he is looking upon the face of God, but he is seeing only himself in the mirror of his own self-satisfied projection.
- That's made abundantly clear by the way he looks down on the tax collector – a certain sign that he knows neither God nor himself - he uses prayer to draw attention to himself, & to instruct others to live as he lives.
- But Jesus does not condemn him; he simply states that the Pharisee's prayer does him no good, because it leaves him in the same state after as before.
- The tax collector is also standing apart, but it is because he feels unworthy of being part of the assembly; he does not even dare to raise his eyes to heaven, but he is there, pleading with God to forgive him.
- Unlike the Pharisee, he is in touch with reality, & his humble plea opens him to God's forgiving love.
- It's no wonder that Jesus said that the tax-collectors (& prostitutes & all those on the margins of society) are making their way to the kingdom before many so-called good people.