

PHARISEE



PUBLICAN



Jesus loved to tell stories. One day he told about two builders.

He said there was a wise builder and a foolish builder. The wise builder built his house on solid rock. The foolish builder built his house on sand, which was a lot easier.



When storms came, the house on the sand went down in splinters. But the house on the rock stood strong.

Building our lives on Jesus is like building a house on a rock. No matter what comes our way, God will help us stand strong in his love.



THE SCRIBES

Find the hidden words.



H	Q	U	S	A	V	M	R	V	Q	H	P	L
D	M	J	P	K	I	G	N	L	U	Y	K	N
N	I	E	W	S	L	H	D	D	Y	S	I	N
N	V	W	S	E	P	R	O	P	H	E	T	S
G	N	I	H	C	A	E	T	L	P	S	A	X
M	O	S	T	M	R	N	R	Q	V	O	N	D
N	I	H	G	O	N	M	R	W	K	M	A	Z
E	G	A	U	G	N	A	L	J	I	G	I	E
H	C	U	E	T	A	T	N	E	P	Z	M	L

MOSES

PROPHETS

JEWISH

MISSION

LANGUAGE

PENTATEUCH

TEACHING

TANAIM

Pharisee & Publican

If we missed it last Sunday, today, with its contrasting scripture lesson, sets us on the right road in preparation for the Great Fast. The Church inspires us to put this prayer on our lips “Open the doors of repentance to me, Giver of Life....” Unless there is genuine repentance and sorrow for our sinful transgressions, there is no Great Fast and certainly, we cannot celebrate the glorious and radiant Resurrection.

A number of keys are necessary to prepare us for the experience of repentance and open its doors. These are needed for spiritual renewal which is why the *kontakion* for today issues its own invitation. This changeable hymn regularly teaches us and offers an insight for our celebration: “Let us bring to the Lord the signs of the Publican and as sinners let us approach the Lord. He desires the salvation of all mankind; He grants forgiveness to all who repent. For us He became man while remaining God, co-eternal with the Father.”

This parable serves our need perfectly as we process along the pilgrimage route towards the time which in detail, depth and purposeful meaning will lead us to the glorious Resurrection victory. He raises our insight into thinking introspectively about ourselves and how often we feel so self-satisfied when we look into the mirror and really enjoy what we see. Of course, we are talking about our own spiritual dimension, not the quickly passing and over-emphasized physical dimension of our being. If only we were half as interested in how our soul looks instead of how our body appears to others, far more would save their souls.

Not only was the Pharisee smugly pleased with himself because he did what was expected of him, but he looked down on others whose inner soul he, of course, could not read. He liked to think of himself as a faithful Jew because he lived up to the challenges of the Law of Moses. He observed the letter of the law, but hardly ever its spirit. Our approach in following the Saviour is to live up to the spirit of the Law because of what it does to reshape our thinking, infuse our soul us with grace and strengthen us in our spiritual journey.

If it is our propose to grow in spiritual stature, then we must advance the cause of the soul so that its strength and resolve permeates the counter effective tactics of our physical being which is prone to sinfulness.

in our own smugness, how often have we made ourselves feel good because we simply do what is expected of us? We describe ourselves in superlative terms as we look down upon the failed aspirations of those who surround us.

So such as the Pharisee, our Lord issues a very practical reminder. On the day our Lord was teaching the disciples, He warned them that due to lack of adequate reciprocity to his first offered and shown love, genuine believers and those outside the circle of belief would be scandalized. Then, enumerating what course of action is to be pursued in increasing and living a life of faith, the gentle but insistent Saviour teaches, 'If one of you had a servant plowing or shearing sheep; and he came in from the fields, would you not say to him, 'Come and sit down at table?' Would you not rather say, 'Prepare my supper. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink because you can eat and drink afterwards?' Would he be grateful to the servant who was only carrying out his orders? It is quite the same with you who hear me. When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'" Luke 17: 7 – 10.

Our Lord on this Sunday is telling us very plainly but nevertheless emphatically, that we often neglect to fulfill the dignity of Christian responsibility in our daily lives and praise ourselves for our lack of understanding and vision. We emphasize our delusion and lose our souls in the process.

Everything the Pharisee did today was for bolstering his own fractured ego. In superficially observing the Law, he failed to look deeper at what it attempted to cultivate in his soul. Did his lifestyle change? Was he actually living in a way that was pleasing to God? Did he connect what God expected of him and the values he was attempting to grow in his soul? Why did he not recognize believers are not minimalists? Even with Christ destroying such thinking, why do we still like to think we are not capable of what the Lord expects? Why do we assume the Lord is happy with paltry excuses? How many people do we know who are satisfied with calling themselves Orthodox while in name only they exist in empty living?

The publican enters the temple to pray and sees forthrightly he is not worthy to be there. He believes, but not yet totally or fully enough. He knows in his mind, by intellectual assent, which is easy enough, that he is a son of Abraham, but in his heart and soul, this richness has not yet been accepted or lived. His approach today is like that of the mute boy's father who witnesses a miracle, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief" Mark 9: 24. The mind witnesses, but was not equipped to make living truth

its own reality. The publican in his rare appearance in the temple comes to seek heavenly grace which because of his experience and lifestyle is difficult to appropriate, but he genuinely tries and today, finally succeeds.

An interesting and insightful story is told about St. Ephrem the Syrian, one of the great saints of our blessed Church, who was about to take a long journey. He prayed to God, asking him to send along some partner with whom he could carry on a worthwhile conversation during the trip. He wanted to learn something as well as have the time pass eventfully. He began his journey and soon overtook an elderly woman. "Well," thought Ephrem, "what in the world can I learn from this old lady?" The saint stopped and the woman looked at him. "Why do you stare at me," he finally asked. And the lady answered, "I look at you because woman was originally made from man; but you ought not stare at me, rather look at the good brown earth because man was made from the dust by the hand of the Creator." Needless to say, Ephrem writes that he thanked God for this worthwhile lesson in humility.

The very first and most important key to preparation for the Great Fast is to learn the sense and value of humility, which actually only is a truthful and realistic look at ourselves without inflating ourselves or misshaping ourselves as is often done in a circus side show trick mirrors. May the Lord grant us the grace, but even more importantly, may we use the grace He grants that with deep meaning we can pray, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." Amen.