

Here are some words from the well-known and famous about HUMILITY:

In 1963, President John Kennedy was presenting comedian Bob Hope with the Congressional Medal of Freedom for “services to his country.” Mr. Hope could not resist a chance for a laugh. So he told the president, “I feel very humble about this award---- but I think I have the strength of character to fight it.”

The late boxing champion Muhammad Ali topped that by saying, “When you are as great as I am – it is hard to be humble.”

And Comedian Phyllis Diller said that her greatest teacher of humility – was the mirror.

Two people went up to the temple to pray – one had a problem with humility, and one did not. Hold onto that thought for a minute. . .

When we want to learn more about prayer, we are quick to consult the experts on prayer. . . people like Teresa of Avila, Francis, Benedict, Dominic, or maybe Thomas Merton---- as well as our favorite contemporary spiritual writers such as Max Lacado or Joyce Rupp.

It is true that these so-called experts on prayer can be helpful by providing us with new insights into prayer or new methods of prayer. But we must never assume that only the experts really know how to pray or that, somehow, we must be an expert before we can pray.

For the truth is, when it comes to prayer, it’s okay to be an amateur. In fact, in some cases, it is even better to be an amateur than a pro.

The story Jesus tells us today can illustrate this truth: these two people who went up to the temple to pray – one who had a problem with humility and one who did not.

So the Pharisee struts into the temple – right to the front for all to see. He is the expert on prayer, the professional prayer, if you will.

He begins his prayer by thanking God – which is certainly a good thing --- except that he is thanking God that he is not like the rest of humanity: greedy, dishonest, adulterous --- and that he is not like that miserable tax collector there in the back of the temple.

Then the Pharisee rattles off a list of all the things he had done for God: he has prayed, he has fasted, he has given alms.

Newsflash: this is the one who has a problem with humility – so stuck on himself as he. . .

In contrast, we have the publican – or the tax collector. He is the amateur at prayer. He stays in the back of the temple, bows his head, beats his breast, and quietly murmurs: “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

This one humbly knows his place in the universe – that God is at the center, not him. And that God is God –and he is not.

Jesus declares that it was this tax collector who offered the finest prayer – it was this amateur who showed up the pro!

Sometimes we can get all bent out of shape over our prayer and think things like: “I don’t know how to pray. . . my prayer is dumb. . . I always end up saying the same things over and over. . . everyone else can pray better than I can.”

When tempted to think such things, we should recall the humble tax collector beating his breast in the back of the temple. And we should remember that God loves to hear our prayer – no matter how simple, awkward, or ordinary it is. Because God loves us, even if we are only amateurs at prayer.

Two people went up to the temple to pray --- one had a problem with humility – and one did not.  
God be merciful to us: for we all are sinners.