

HOMILY 30TH SUN OT YRC 2019

There was a young girl named Sheila. She was with her second adoptive family. The first adoption did not work out. The first family also had biological children and Sheila never felt part of the family. The final thing that made her feel unwanted was when the family took a trip to Disney World. They took their biological children and left Sheila at home. After that Sheila had a lot of behavior problems and they gave her up to the foster care system. When the second family adopted her, they also had biological children, and Sheila's behavior was out of control. Sheila had been through a lot, and they wanted to make things up to her. They decided to take a family trip to Disney World with Sheila. When they told her, Sheila's behavior got worse, but they took the trip as planned. At the end of the first day in Disney World, her father asked Sheila how she liked Disney World. She smiled and said: "Daddy, I finally got to go to Disney World, and it was not because I was good, it is because I'm yours, it is because I belong to this family." I was very blessed to have parents that loved me. They were not perfect, but I never doubted that they loved me, and how empowering that was. I did not necessarily appreciate it when I was young, but I certainly do now. We also have to remember that we belong to a big Catholic family with a Father that loves us. We do not have to earn his love, it is a free gift. It is just up to us whether we will accept the gift.

We hear another parable in the Gospel reading. We hear about the Pharisee and the tax collector. I do not think that either of them knows that God loves them unconditionally. First of all we encounter the Pharisee. He thinks he has to earn God's love through acts and by comparing himself to other people. Since he feels better than others, he believes that he has earned God's love. When I was praying with the Gospel I thought: "Thank you Lord that I am not like that Pharisee," but by thinking that I was just like the Pharisee, comparing myself to the

Pharisee and thinking that I am better than him. We both already have God's love. And when we are loved we want to please the one who loves us. I bet Sheila's behavior improved after that trip to Disney World. I know that many times I kept my behavior in check because I did not want to disappoint my parents who loved me. Putting people down so that we can feel superior definitely does not please God, the one who loves us. And the tax collector, he stood at a distance and would not even look to heaven. He compared himself to others and felt he had nothing to offer God, but of course he did.

When we compare ourselves to others, religion becomes a competition. The Pharisee was not a bad guy. The Pharisees were leaders of the local synagogues. I am sure he was doing a lot of good. And tax collectors collected taxes for the Romans who occupied Israel, and they collected more taxes than we do and kept the money. They were seen as traitors and sinners. But the tax collector's whole life was not defined by being a tax collector. If the Pharisee and tax collector both knew that they were loved by God, they could have stopped comparing themselves to each other, they could have both accepted God's love and mercy. They could have seen each other as brothers and helped each other change their lives to please God, the one who loves them.

We are all loved by God and do not have to earn his love. His love and grace is a free gift. We all need God's mercy and grace to change our lives to please God. We are all brothers and sisters in God's family and we need to help each other. We all have our unique challenges, and we need to stop comparing ourselves to one another. We will not be judged based upon being better than others, we will be judged based upon how we resemble Christ. We are all part of a big Catholic family and we are also part of God's human family. It is never about us and them, it is just us.