

In last week's Gospel we heard a parable about a stubborn widow who went after an unjust judge until she received justice. The parable was told by Jesus to encourage persistence in prayer. Pray and do not lose heart. Today we have the second part of his teaching on prayer and here the lesson is about humility. When you come before the Lord- set aside the grand standing, the bragging, the arrogance and be like the tax-collector, bowing your head and praying, "Have mercy on me a sinner."

But how do we understand humility? What do we mean by that word? Grovelling, a poor self-image, allowing ourselves to be a door-mat? What does humility look like when it comes to our relationship with God?

C.S. Lewis was a great Christian apologist of the early 20th century. He is probably most famous for authoring the classical children's books: *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the rest of the Narnia series. Lewis had a very profound conversion in his life; he went from being an atheist to a deeply devout Christian, becoming a great champion of the Christian faith.

Lewis married late in life, and he was deeply in love. However, after only a few years his wife was diagnosed with cancer and died. He was devastated, overwhelmed with grief. He writes about his experience in a book entitled a *Grief Observed*.

"If my house collapsed at one blow, that is because it was a house of cards...If I had really cared, as I thought I did, about the sorrows of the world, I should not have been overwhelmed when my own sorrow came. It has been an imaginary faith playing a game with innocuous little counters labelled, Illness, Pain, Death and Loneliness. I thought I

trusted the rope until it mattered to me whether it would bear me or not. Now it mattered and I find that I do not trust.”

Humility is a commitment to the truth. Lewis in his reflection on grief humbly admits that the faith he thought he had was not really that true. His supposed deep Christian life was not that profound.

The Pharisee in today’s Gospel is a bit over the top. What kind of person would come before God in prayer and talk like that? But are we truthful before God- are we humble?

Lewis describes his crisis in terms of playing a game, the game of faith with innocuous little counters? His game pieces were labelled Illness, Pain, Death and Loneliness. When we talk about the spiritual life what other names could we come up with? Repentance, compassion, mercy, fidelity, forgiveness, charity, sacrifice, generosity, kindness, chastity, commitment, hope. We could probably come up with more. We stand before God, not in arrogance but with no depth. The values of the Gospel have no depth in our lives; they are not real.

But how do we make them real? How do we go deeper? By the path of humility. By being like the tax collector of today’s Gospel, standing aside in prayer, saying “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner.”

(Repeat)