



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Eleventh Sunday After Trinity, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

*“ And the Publican, standing afar off,  
would not lift up so much as his eyes  
unto heaven, but smote upon his breast,  
saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*

Today's Gospel lesson shows us two individuals as they appear before God in prayer. Not as they appear in their communities, in their workplaces, or even in their families, but as they appear in prayer, in relationship to God.

The Pharisee saw himself as peculiarly blessed by God. He used his religious traditions to persuade himself that he could perfect himself by answering the demands of his society. He professed thanks to God, but he hardly recognized

any direct duties to his Maker. He thought he did all that was required of him if he satisfied public opinion. To him, to be religious was to keep the peace toward others, to share his community's concern for its poor, to abstain from gross vice, to regularly attend worship services, and to set a good example for others. His alms and fastings were not done in penance, but to fulfill the expectations of his comfortable social position as a well-behaved, decorous, consistent, and respectable member of the community. The Pharisee was not concerned with motives or intentions, he was occupied with deeds bear upon the social fabric

and which gain the praise of men.. He had little to do with the Lord of conscience and knew nothing of shame, humiliation, and penance.

The Publican, on the other hand, knew he was a sinner, a social outcast, despised by all because he served the Roman occupiers and took unfair advantage of his own people. He did not dare even to approach the other worshippers but stood afar off. But in his prayer he did not think of other men but of his God. He had a sense of the holiness, power and mercy of a totally other and infinitely great God and would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven. Like the most worthy Job, in the presence of God, he can say: "Mine eye seeth **Thee**, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." By his outward gestures, the Publican indicated that he had some recognition of God's *presence* in this time of prayer.

He was totally wrapped up in the experience. He could not compare himself with others, he was aware only of God and of himself, standing in relationship to God. He was acutely aware of his wickedness of thought, word and deed. He could not lift his eyes to the all-Holy, "but smote upon his breast, saying God be merciful to me a sinner." He felt the immeasurable distance between himself and God and wanted, above all, to be reconciled to God.

In his prayer, the Publican knew himself as a sinner; he knew God as merciful; and he hungered to draw closer to God's presence.

Jesus said : "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. " *Amen*