Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else: “Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, “I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get.” The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted.’

Point to Ponder

“If we—all of us—accept the grace of Jesus Christ, he changes our heart and from sinners makes us saints. To become holy we do not need to turn our eyes away and look somewhere else, or have as it were the face on a holy card! No, no, that is not necessary. To become saints only one thing is necessary: to accept the grace that the Father gives us in Jesus Christ. There, this grace changes our heart and from sinners makes us saints. To become holy we do not need to turn our eyes away and look somewhere else, or have as it were a sense of baffled wonder. We envy his ability to hope so radically in God’s mercy, but we are afraid to let go of everything and surrender ourselves to His care. We fear God’s justice, and do not trust His mercy.

In the same interview, Benedict spoke of how, like John Paul II, Pope Francis’ “pastoral practice is expressed in the fact that he continually speaks to us of God’s mercy.” He points out that “under a veneer of self-assuredness and self-righteousness, the man of today hides a deep knowledge of his wounds and his unworthiness before God. He is waiting perhaps unknowingly) for mercy.” Pope Francis, when asked about this explains that ‘humanity is wounded, deeply wounded. Either it does not know how to cure its wounds, or it believes it’s not possible to cure them.’ The tax collector in this story serves for us as a model, of one who knows himself deeply, and of his need for mercy – but also one who knows also the mystery of God’s unfathomable Mercy and trusts in God’s goodness to give it to him. He hopes in the gift of mercy, and opens himself to receive it.