

XI Trinity 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

1 Cor. 15.1-11 St. Luke 18.9-14

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“Before humanity can be helped, it must be understood, and before it can be understood, it must be loved.”

These compelling words were written by a Father Hudson Stuck, who was the Anglican Archdeacon of Alaska and the Yukon from 1904 until his death in 1920. I first learned about Father Stuck in the least-likely setting...a family-style BBQ and musical review while visiting Denali National Park 20 years ago. He is a modern-day Saint of God who has appeared in several previous sermons.

Father Stuck was asked to deliver the Sermon to the graduating class of Columbia University on June 4, 1916. He chose the Parable of the Lawyer and the Tax Collector to talk about what it really meant to serve God and others. The graduating class consisted of men who planned on becoming teachers, social workers, lawyers, doctors and priests. He challenged them to be selfless in their work, perhaps something they hadn't thought about.

In the Parable of the Lawyer and the Tax Collector, the Lawyer stands in front of the Altar and thanks God that he is not greedy, dishonest, or an adulterer...“like everyone else”. He fasts two days a week and gives God ten percent of his income. He's doing everything the Law required. But our Lawyer friend is especially critical of the Tax Collector, who can't even look up at the Altar. He acknowledges hasn't always done the right thing. All he can do is ask God to have mercy on him.

Nothing the Lawyer says about his spiritual life is untrue. His problem is in his attitude toward God, the blessings he has received, and his unkind dismissal of the Tax Collector everyone else whose spiritual life he thinks is worthless. His self-righteous attitude reflects the true disposition of his heart. He thinks he is right with God because of his religious observances. He has forgotten true religion in God's eyes is all about showing love and compassion toward others.

For Hudson Stuck, the Gospel teaches us the legitimacy of our faith is not measured by church attendance but by its practical application in the world. His vision of authentic Christianity involved tangible acts of

service to others. Christian love is an action focused on doing what's right for others...even when those actions cause us hardships and suffering. If you want to learn how Hudson Stuck put his faith into practice as a missionary priest in Alaska before trains, planes and automobiles...read his book *Ten Thousand Miles with a Dogsled*. It's an entertaining and thought-provoking book.

Let's ask ourselves what brought us to Mass today. We love our *Book of Common Prayer*, but it is not our religion. Saint James reminds us what God the Father considers to be true and genuine religion is to take care of widows and orphans and keep ourselves from being corrupted by the world. Our faith is not just something we say we have...our faith is how we live our lives. Remember the Latin axiom: *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi...the law of prayer is the law of belief which is the law of living*.

We should see something of ourselves in both the Lawyer and the Tax Collector in the Gospel. There are times we show the same inflated sense of self the Lawyer shows. There are times we might be tempted to compare our own spiritual lives to others. We don't need to say to God..."Look at what I've done for you"...he already knows it. There are times the only thing we can say to God is, "Have mercy on us".

In the Epistle, Saint Paul tells us that what he has received he is passing on to us, to be believed and put into practice in our lives. How we act toward others says a lot about the disposition of our heart.

Jesus concluded the Parable by saying the Tax Collector and not the Lawyer went home right with God. The Tax Collector's prayer was an act of humility that came from his heart. Our hearts must be Christ-centered and grounded in selfless LOVE. We must reach out to others with acts of kindness and compassion.

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