

1. Hosea
 - a. Today as dawn breaks across Alabama, the Lord tells us through the prophet Hosea, “Your piety is like a morning cloud, like the dew that early passes away” (Hosea 6:1). We so often are like the superficial soil that Jesus describes in the parable of the Sower and the Seed: it initially receives the seed of the Word of God with great joy, but because we don’t allow that word to go deep, to drill through the thin layer of limestone underneath the Palestinian soil of our hearts, when the hot Sun arises, it scorches the growth of the seed because of lack of roots.
 - b. The Lord calls us to more than a morning cloud piety. He calls us to perseverance in conversion, in turning toward him. That doesn’t mean we’ll never fall, but that we will continue to get up striving. St. Josémaría Escrivá used to say that the Christian life is one of “nunc, coepi,” “Now I begin again.” And we begin again today, saying together with Hosea, “Come, let us return to the Lord.” “Let us know, let us strive to know the Lord.” “He will come to us like the rain that waters the earth” (Hosea 6:1,3).
2. As we begin this day of persevering prayer wanting to bathe in the living water of that rain, the Lord Jesus talks to us directly about prayer in the Gospel. It’s a crucial lesson about our dispositions in prayer and in life. In his public ministry Jesus had often quoted the word’s Hosea announced for him today that we repeated many times in the Responsorial Psalm, “It is merciful love I desire,” and as we pray we’re called to beg for that merciful love and then to share it. Without this we do not really come to know the Lord in prayer.
3. Two men, Jesus said, went up to the temple to pray (Luke 18: 9-14).
 - a. The first man was a Pharisee. He prayed, “Thank you, God, that I am not like the rest of humanity — greedy, dishonest, adulterous — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income”. The man was what most people would call today a good religious man. He was going up to Jerusalem to the temple to pray. He, like his fellow Pharisees, never sought to do the minimum in the practice of the faith but as much as they can. Whereas Jews were required to fast only once a year on the Day of Atonement, the Pharisees fasted twice a week. Whereas Jews needed to tithe only certain things, he tithed on his whole income. He was outwardly a role model. But there was something drastically wrong in his conception of God, his conception of the faith, and his conception of others. The first clue is that Jesus said, “He spoke this prayer to *himself*.” That doesn’t mean that he simply said it quietly so that he alone could hear, but, in a sense, he was praying that prayer to himself, that he was something special. He thanked God that he was not like so many others, who were thieves, rogues, adulterers and publicans. He rejoiced in what he saw was his virtue, but what he failed to recognize was that he was proud, judgmental, vain, boastful and uncharitable. He failed to see his own sinfulness. He failed to ask God for mercy, because he didn’t think he needed it. Compared to so many around him, and the other person praying in the temple, he considered himself a saint among sinners.
 - b. We’ll come back to him and to his attitude, but it’s important for us to note the contrast Jesus makes with the other man who went up to the temple to pray that day. The tax collector was hated by his fellow Jews not because he was collaborating with the Romans who were subjugating the Jewish people, but because in the carrying out of his duty, tax collectors would routinely rip off their people for greed. They were assessed a certain amount that needed to be collected; whatever they could get beyond that was theirs to keep, and many of the tax collectors were ripping off the poor precisely in order to live well. They were in general corrupt, similar, in some ways, to an ancient mafia class that the authorities would do nothing about. One would think that someone in this circumstance, who had given his life over to this type of betrayal of his nation and betrayal of so many people who lived around him, wouldn’t pray at all. For him to pray, some might say, was hypocritical. But he knew

that even if others might never forgive him, God could, and he knew he needed God's forgiveness. With no arrogance whatsoever, no self-importance, and great humility, he stayed in the back, beat his breast and said, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." Sirach says, "The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds!" (Sirach 35:21) and his prayer did. He was totally conscious that he didn't deserve forgiveness, but knew that the Lord was kind and merciful, that the Lord's mercy endures forever, and with great repentance he prayed for that gift.

- c. Jesus gave a startling conclusion to the parable. He told his listeners that of the two, the good man who fasts, tithes and lives outwardly by the mosaic law, and the detested one who rips off his own people and conspires with the pagan authorities, only one of them had their prayer heard and left the temple in a right relationship with God. It was the publican! To understand the surprise, it would have been like Jesus substituted a Missionary of Charity for a Pharisee and a drug pusher for the publican and said that when the two left the Church only the drug pusher was justified, was truly on good terms with God. It would be like he said a pope and a prostitute went to Church to pray but the only one who left justified was the prostitute. Such a comment was not about the type of life they were leading, but about the type of humble prayer they made. No matter what type of life we lead, we need to pray well, which means to pray humbly with a recognition for God's mercy.
 - d. This whole parable points to what Jesus had said elsewhere, "I have come not to call the self-righteous, but sinners!" If we wish to come to prayer and leave on good terms with the Lord, we need first to recognize that we're sinners, that we need his mercy, ask for it and seek to live by it. Only sinners need a savior. Only those who pray for mercy will receive it. Only the truly humble will be exalted. St. Luke tells us that Jesus addressed the parable in today's Gospel to "those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else."
 - e. There's a story about Frederick the Great, King of Prussia from 1740 to 1786, who visited a prison one day. Each of the prisoners he spoke with claimed to be innocent: the victim of misunderstanding, prejudice, or simple injustice. Finally the king stopped at the cell of an inmate who remained silent. "I suppose you're innocent too," Frederick remarked. "No, sir," the man replied. "I'm guilty. I deserve to be here." Turning to the warden, the king said: "Warden, release this scoundrel at once before he corrupts all these fine, innocent people in here." What better example could we have of the words in our first reading: "The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds"? What better witness we could have to how we're called to recognize that we're sinners.
4. The message of the parable Jesus gives us today is ever urgent for us to grasp.
 - a. There are of course still self-righteous people in the Church, who when they look at themselves in the mirror, think that they're something special, that they're better than other people, that, sure, they may have their weaknesses and problems, but at least they're not like those who have "really sinned," by having conceived children out of wedlock or gone to jail. They focus mainly on what they have done right rather than what they have done wrong. They might admit that they, sure, they need a "little" of God's mercy, but nothing near what other's need.
 - b. But this self-righteousness isn't just a problem for those who, like the Pharisees, actually do try to live religiously. It can also afflict those who live like the publican. That's very popular today in our culture and even in the Church. Those who are clearly violating the Lord's commandments left and right — by never coming to Church, or living with someone out of wedlock or by engaging in a gay lifestyle — rather than repenting for their sins and coming to beg for God's forgiveness, actually attack the Church or those who are seeking to call them to conversion for being "intolerant" or "judgmental." They can pray like this, "I thank you Lord, because I am not one of those hypocritical and intolerant modern Pharisees, who worry about fasting, who worry about coming to Church and praying, who worry about tithing, but who in real life am worse than I am!"
 5. What's the Lord want from us?
 - a. He wants us
 - i. First to recognize that, whether we have been religiously observant or not, in order to have our prayer heard, we humbly need God's mercy and need to ask for it.
 - ii. Second, rather than focusing on others' sins, we need to concentrate on our own. The problem with the Pharisee in the Gospel was that he preferred to focus on what he was

doing right, rather than what he was doing wrong. That's a perennial temptation. We focus on the commandments we're keeping, rather than the ones we're breaking. And many of us, including many of us who pray, leave unjustified, because we haven't been humble enough to beat our breasts and acknowledge our need for God's help.

- iii. There's also a clear application here to the Sacrament of Confession as well. If we genuinely recognize our need for God's mercy, we'll be so grateful for his having instituted a Sacrament on Easter Sunday evening whereby, through the ministrations of the same priests through whom he gives us his body and blood, he takes away our sins for real. Those who don't examine their consciences and come to receive the sacrament of reconciliation are most likely like the Pharisee in today's Gospel parable.
6. So we've all come to this retreat to pray. Some of us are like the Pharisee. Some like the Publican. Most of us, a little bit of both. All of us, however, want to leave justified. The only way to do so is to pray for mercy, receive mercy and share that mercy.
 7. St. Patrick
 - a. A great model for us in this is St. Patrick. At fifteen years of age he committed a fault, which appears not to have been a great crime, yet was to him a subject of tears during the remainder of his life. He laments that when he was sixteen he lived still ignorant of God, meaning of the devout knowledge and fervent love of God, for he was always a Christian; he never ceased to bewail this neglect, and wept when he remembered that he had been one moment of his life insensible of the divine love. He recognized his need for God's mercy. He received it and then he went to spread it. His piety wasn't like the morning cloud. He knew the Lord in prayer.
 - b. As we seek to grow in prayer with the help of Pope Benedict, St. Patrick's example is enormous.
 - i. When a slave with the barbarians, he had recourse to God with his whole heart, in fervent prayer and fasting, and from that time faith and the love of God acquired a constantly renewed strength in his tender soul.
 - ii. He relates in his "Confessio" that during his captivity while tending the flocks he prayed many times in the day: "the love of God", he added, "and His fear increased in me more and more, and the faith grew in me, and the spirit was roused, so that, in a single day, I have said as many as a hundred prayers, and in the night nearly the same, so that whilst in the woods and on the mountain, even before the dawn, I was roused to prayer and felt no hurt from it, whether there was snow or ice or rain; nor was there any slothfulness in me, such as I see now, because the spirit was then fervent within me."
 - iii. After six months spent in slavery, Saint Patrick was admonished by God in a dream to return to his own country, and was informed that a ship was then ready to sail there. He went at once to the seacoast, though at a great distance, and found the vessel, but he could not obtain his passage — probably for want of money. Patrick was returning to his hut, praying as he went, when the sailors, though pagans, called him back and took him on board.
 - iv. The saint returned towards his hut, praying as he went; but the sailors, though pagans, called him back and took him on board. After three days' sail they made land, probably in the north of Scotland; but wandered twenty-seven days through deserts, and were a long while distressed for want of provisions, finding nothing to eat. Patrick had often entertained the company of the infinite power of God; they therefore asked him why he did not pray for relief. Animated by a strong faith, he assured them that if they would address themselves with their whole hearts to the true God, he would hear and help them. They did so, and on the same day met with a herd of swine.
 - v. While he was at home with his parents, God manifested to him, by diverse visions, that He destined him for the great work of the conversion of Ireland.
 - vi. Many miracles through prayer
 - c. Lorica (Breastplate). What I'd like to talk to you about though is the prayer he would say each morning and live throughout the day so that his morning piety wouldn't dissipate. It's called his Lorica or Breastplate. He would pray it and he would wear within his clothes a patch with this prayer inscribed. A breastplate is armor.

- i. You know St. Paul's great image from Ephesians 6.
 1. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil.
 2. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.
 3. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground.
 4. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth,
 5. clothed with righteousness as a breastplate,
 6. and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace.
 7. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all [the] flaming arrows of the evil one.
 8. And take the helmet of salvation
 9. and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
- ii. When priests vest each day, we say similar prayers:
 1. When we put on the amice, we ask the Lord to place on us the helmet of salvation to repel the assaults of the devil.
 2. When we put on the white alb, we ask the Lord to purify our hearts in the Blood of the Lamb.
 3. When we gird ourselves with the cincture, we ask the Lord to gird us with purity and extinguish in us the fire of concupiscence so that the virtue of continence and chastity may shine.
 4. When we put on the stole, we beg him to return to us the stole of immortality lost by our first parents.
 5. And when we don the chasuble, we ask him to help us to bear the sweet yoke and light burden of the Gospel.
- iii. St. Patrick composed a much longer prayer that he prayed each day. We'll sing a beautiful metrical version of it later at Holy Communion, so that as we receive the Lord we're able to receive him in this way. Here I'll do a more literal version.
 1. But I'd like to do a gloss on it here
 2. **I arise today**
 - a. Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the **Trinity**,
 - b. Through the belief in the threeness,
 - c. Through confession of the oneness
 - d. Of the Creator of Creation.
 - i. **Entering into the Trinity.**
 3. I arise today
 - a. Through the strength of Christ's birth with his baptism,
 - b. Through the strength of his crucifixion with his burial,
 - c. Through the strength of his resurrection with his ascension,
 - d. Through the strength of his descent for the judgment of Doom.
 - i. **Begins with Christ and the mysteries of his life. We enter into them and live them.**
 4. I arise today
 - a. Through the strength of the love of Cherubim,
 - b. In obedience of angels,
 - c. In the service of archangels,
 - d. In hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
 - e. In prayers of patriarchs,
 - f. In predictions of prophets,
 - g. In preaching of apostles,

- h. In faith of confessors,
 - i. In innocence of holy virgins,
 - j. In deeds of righteous men.
 - i. **We are part of the Communion of Saints and angels! We're not alone. We have the greatest friends on our side, rooting for us, surrounding us, cheering us on to victory.**
 - ii. **Heb. 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us 2 while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. 3 Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.**
5. I arise today
- a. Through the strength of heaven:
 - b. Light of sun,
 - c. Radiance of moon,
 - d. Splendor of fire,
 - e. Speed of lightning,
 - f. Swiftmess of wind,
 - g. Depth of sea,
 - h. Stability of earth,
 - i. Firmness of rock.
 - i. **All these attributes of creation find their culmination in us.**
6. I arise today
- a. Through God's strength to pilot me:
 - b. God's might to uphold me,
 - c. God's wisdom to guide me,
 - d. God's eye to look before me,
 - e. God's ear to hear me,
 - f. God's word to speak for me,
 - g. God's hand to guard me,
 - h. God's way to lie before me,
 - i. God's shield to protect me,
 - j. God's host to save me
 - k. From snares of devils,
 - l. From temptations of vices,
 - m. From everyone who shall wish me ill,
 - n. Afar and near,
 - o. Alone and in multitude.
 - i. **Depend on God's strength, wisdom, word, prayer.**
 - ii. **Recognize problems and dangers, and then we confront them with power of God.**
7. I summon today all these powers between me and those evils,
- a. Against every cruel merciless power that may oppose my body and soul,
 - b. Against incantations of false prophets,
 - c. Against black laws of pagandom
 - d. Against false laws of heretics,
 - e. Against craft of idolatry,

- f. Against spells of witches and smiths and wizards,
- g. Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul.
- h. Christ to shield me today
- i. Against poison, against burning,
- j. Against drowning, against wounding,
- k. So that there may come to me abundance of reward.

- i. **Christ is our strength**

- 8. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
 - a. Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
 - b. Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
 - c. Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,
 - d. Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
 - e. Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
 - f. Christ in every eye that sees me,
 - g. Christ in every ear that hears me.
 - i. **This is a beautiful prayer of the presence of God.**
 - ii. **Christ is all around us at all times, in grace or in mercy. We need to recognize his presence and start to observe him in others.**
- 9. I arise today
 - a. Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
 - b. Through belief in the threeness,
 - c. Through confession of the oneness,
 - d. Of the Creator of Creation.
 - e. Salvation is the Lord's, salvation is the Lord's, salvation is Christ's.
 - f. May Thy salvation, O Lord, be always with us.
 - i. **Finish by binding ourselves again to God and to his salvation.**

d. Eucharist

- i. The Eucharist is St. Patrick's daily bread. Greatest gift of God's mercy. To enter into this sacrifice was to enter into his mercy.
- ii. Christ, who is mercy incarnate, is all around us, but most importantly wants to come within us as within a temple. We bind ourselves to him who comes from heaven to bind himself to us and we ask him through the intercession of St. Patrick to help us to keep that union in prayer in the midst of all that he names that can confront us!
- iii. We have come to this holy place to pray. Let us follow St. Patrick's humble example of prayer for God's mercy and help, so that we may leave this Mass, this retreat, justified and exalted, and become his instruments to bring others to experience through humility the richness of his mercy and receive eternal exaltation!