

Sermon: 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 7:1-10 (v. 4)

Theme: True worthiness

Goal: True worthiness before God means humbleness and faith

Dear Friends,

Introduction: What do people think of you? Are you a kind and friendly person? Are you willing to help others? Are you successful in your carrier? – What do people think of you? What is their opinion about you? Are you a harsh person? a rude person? a selfish person?

What do you think of yourself? “I’m a very good person... I have a strong personality... I am always right in my opinions...”

What does God think of you? What is His opinion about you?

I – “This man deserves...”

People had a good opinion of the centurion of Capernaum. It is amazing to see the Jewish leaders interceding for the Centurion. This was not common at that time, because the Centurion was a representative of the oppressors, the Romans. The soldiers used to abuse their authority and to exploit the people. But this was not the case in Capernaum. The Jewish leaders reported to Jesus: “This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”

As we remembered the Sunday when the children did a revision of the Ten Commandments, the summary of the Commandments according to Jesus is: To love God above all things and to love our neighbour as ourselves. It seems that the Centurion fits more or less in this category: He loved the people and, maybe, he loved the God

of this people as well, because he had built the worship house for them; and he loved his servant who was sick, - something *remarkable that such a person cared deeply about one of his slaves at all* (ABC 1217).

Jesus was willing to help him and went with the people in direction to the Centurion's house. This shows us that Jesus doesn't discriminate any person. The Centurion was not member of the church neither part of the Jewish people. This matches with *the church-outreach emphasis of the Pentecost Season* (Series C 164) we are living now till the next Advent Season. Christ is for all. The 3000 people who were baptized on the first Pentecost were from different countries, languages and positions; but nothing was required from them to be baptized but repentance and faith in Jesus. This story of the Centurion of Capernaum was a good beginning to open the eyes of the disciples for their future task to go all around the world and to make disciples from all nations.

But did Jesus really go to help the Centurion because this man was worth of it? *Jesus was in the habit of responding to human need, not to human worth. The worth or unworth of a person in need had always been irrelevant. God's actions do no depend on human worth as many think. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners* (Series C 166), and not because we deserved His sacrifice. This is a very crucial point in this story: How do we face our relationship with God? Based on our worthiness? Or based on God's mercy and love?

II – "I do not deserve..."

The reaction of the Centurion shows us the right attitude toward God. He was not asking for a favour based on his worthiness or on what he did. It was not like: *I scratched your back, now you scratch mine...*(Series C 166). No, he was humble enough to recognize that he

didn't deserve anything from Jesus, but he relied only on Jesus' compassion. He didn't even go personally to Jesus, but he sent some friends to say to Jesus: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you." In deep humbleness he appeals to Jesus' mercy, without imposing Him anything.

What a big difference to many who tried to 'force' God to attend their prayer, as if God had the obligation to answer according to their wishes ; or who present themselves as good people who deserve God's favour. Or, on the other hand, some who complain before God when they are suffering: I do not deserve to suffer this... or: why do I have to suffer?... or: what did I do to deserve this kind of suffering?...

The Centurion came in humbleness to Christ and confessed his faith in Jesus in such a manner as no one had done it before: *You don't need to come to my house, Master – he said. I believe that you are a man of authority. Say just a word and my servant will be healed!* – As many were looking for miracles by touching Jesus' clothing and by asking Him to impose His hands on them, this man believed in the Word of Jesus: Just one word and the servant would be healed!

Jesus became amazed with the attitude of humbleness and faith of the Centurion, and said to the crowd following Him: "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel!" And the sick servant was found well when the friends of the Centurion arrived home.

Jesus knows our heart and He sees our faith. Of course He knows and supports our good deeds, our obedience to His Law and our faithfulness to His church. But this is not the reason that He listens to our prayers or that He helps us in our distresses. We cannot approach Jesus as we deserved something good. When we approach God at the beginning of our Service, we always confess: *I, a poor*

sinner, confess to you all my sins with which I have ever offended you and justly deserved your punishment now and forever... What we really deserve from God is punishment, because we are never 100% correct and pure. The Christians recognize it and put this confession in the Liturgy at the very beginning of the Service, searching humbly for God's mercy and forgiveness. The Author of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote: "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:19-23).

Conclusion: The humble words of the Centurion are used in some Orders of Service as a prayer before the Lord's Supper: *Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof... Say just a word and your servant will be healed.* It is a great honour and blessing to receive the Lord Himself, *His body and blood, in, with and under the consecrated bread and wine* (Small Catechism, p.235). We don't deserve it, but by God's mercy and love He comes to us to heal us, to forgive us, to assure us the fellowship with Him and with our brothers and sisters. It is all by God's grace, not by our merit or deeds.

What do you think of yourself? We do not have to compare ourselves with others, but we have to look for the patterns God establishes. And we will always find ourselves guilty and not worthy. But by Jesus' mercy we can approach God in humbleness and faith, looking for forgiveness and help. And He will bestow us His grace. In the name of Jesus, Amen.