

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other.

Luke 18:14a



Every year on Ash Wednesday, Episcopal clergy engage in a somewhat peculiar debate. Some churches opt for “Ashes to Go,” offering quick prayers and ashes for people rushing off to work, while others view this on-the-go liturgy as unsettling and consumeristic, considering it an unnecessary concession to the busyness of people’s lives.

In my view, today’s passage from Luke provides guidance on the matter. In these verses, Jesus observes two individuals practicing penance. One follows all the religious protocols, offering lengthy prayers in a display of religious correctness and righteousness. The other is a tax collector who stands at a distance, uttering only a few words of penance. Jesus deliberately

contrasts these two people, emphasizing that what truly matters is the humility and authenticity with which we approach God, rather than rigid adherence to external religious forms.

This serves as a reminder that God prioritizes sincerity and humility as we seek penance. As someone who embraces both traditional church practices and outreach on the sidewalks, I believe these qualities can be found in both settings. We need not position ourselves as judges of others’ prayers and penance; that task belongs to God alone.

Today’s readings

Psalm 51:15–20 | Hosea 6:1–6 | Luke 18:9–14

How can we observe traditional religious practices and also meet people where they are, recognizing that the authenticity and humility of our approach to God matter more than external expressions of faith?