

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

Written less than 200 years before Jesus¹⁰, the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach, the author of this book, sets the stage for the coming Messiah. He is the first inspired writer to make a direct address to God as "Father." He represents the mature religious reflection of Israel in the last couple of centuries before the coming of Christ. In the early Christian Church Sirach was used as a kind of catechism of righteousness for catechumens and held a very prominent place in the liturgy. That is why it was sometimes called "Ecclesiasticus" or "Church Book."¹

12The Lord is a God of justice, who knows no favorites. The level of material prosperity, social standing, or power that someone has does not necessarily describe their righteousness before God. Worldly blessings do not always signal beatitude. Likewise, God is "not unduly partial toward the weak" either.¹

13Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet he hears the cry of the oppressed. God always sides with those who have no one else to side with them. The weakest of the weak have the strongest possible ally in the God who has always been revealed as their special patron.³

14The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint. Widows and orphans enjoy a special protection in the Bible because in ancient civilizations the right of the person and of the family was principally based on the man, husband and father. To be deprived of a husband and father placed the widow and the orphan in a condition which was extremely precarious. They had no rights.² The Catechism tells us that there are "sins that cry to heaven": the blood of Abel, the sin of the Sodomites, the cry of the people oppressed in Egypt, the cry of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan, and injustice to the wage earner.⁴(1867)

16The one who serves God willingly is heard; While one's state in life does not automatically guarantee divine approval of one's requests, the state of our interior life does make a difference. The one who serves God willingly is the one who is guaranteed a hearing.³ **his petition reaches the heavens.**

17The prayer of the lowly The lowly are those who possess "fear of the Lord" which Sirach calls the root, beginning, and crown of wisdom in chapter 1.¹ A humble stance before God is what gives power to our prayers. Humility is honesty. Coming to God in prayer with an open and honest realization of both our need and God's fidelity puts us in a truly humble stance.³ **pierces the clouds;** Picture the prayer of the lowly as an arrow shooting heavenward.¹¹ **it does not rest till it reaches its goal,**

18nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, judges justly and affirms the right, and the Lord will not delay. All prayer is heard by God and He will answer in the best way possible and at the most perfect time.

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Beloved: Conscious of his closeness to death, St. Paul writes in poetic form about his life in the service of the Gospel, about the meaning of death and his hope of heaven.⁵

6I am already being poured out like a libation, Paul sees death as an offering to God, like the libations of oil poured on the altar of sacrifices. Death is the beginning of a journey and he sees the anchor being weighed and the sails unfurled.⁵ **and the time of my departure is at hand.**

7I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. When Paul says that he has "kept the faith" he means that he has carefully handed on the gospel to his successors and that he

has been faithful in his office as evangelist and teacher.⁶ Paul presents the Christian life as a type of spiritual sport: “races” indicates the continuous effort to achieve perfection; training for athletics indicates the practice of self-denial, competing stands for the effort required to resist sin even if that means death.⁵

8From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, This image alludes to the garland or victory wreath used to crown winning athletes in the ancient Olympics.¹² **which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day,** This refers to the Second Coming when Jesus returns to judge all men.¹⁰ **and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance.** St. John Chrysostom points out that the crown, which is bestowed, never withers. It is not made of laurel leaves, it is not a man who places it on our head, it has not been won in the presence of a crowd made up of men, but in a stadium full of angels. In earthly competitions a man fights and strives for days and the only reward he receives is a crown which withers in a matter of hours. That does not happen here: the crown he is given is a glory and honor whose brilliance lasts forever.⁵ “All who have longed for his appearance” refers to those who have lived in a way that shows that they eagerly await the Lord.¹¹

16At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me. Because of the hazards involved in staying with Paul or defending him, some of his friends, even some of his closest friends, have deserted him.⁵ **May it not be held against them!** In imitation of Christ, he forgave them.

17But the Lord stood by me Paul is contrasting the way men have treated him and the way that God has treated him.⁵ **and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it.** In those days all the nations were represented in the Roman capital. And, as Luke tells us in

Acts, Paul remained two years in Rome before his death preaching the kingdom from his lodgings “without any hindrance whatever.” He completed his apostolic commission at the cultural center of the then-known world. Because he was arrested in Jerusalem and had to appeal to Rome for a hearing in a higher court, he had the chance to reach all nations with the saving message of Christ.¹ **And I was rescued from the lion’s mouth.** At this time Paul was saved from a verdict of condemnation. Because he was a Roman citizen, he would not have been thrown to the lions in the Roman circus.¹²

18The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. Paul is not saying that God will protect him from the martyrdom which he sees is imminent. He is expressing his conviction that God will enable him to fight any temptation and will grant him salvation in heaven. Final perseverance is a grace, for in order to reach heaven one needs to be in the grace of God at the moment of death.⁵ According to the Catechism, the Anointing of the Sick fortifies the end of our earthly life like a solid rampart for the final struggles before entering the Father’s house. This sacrament, along with Penance and the Eucharist received as viaticum (for the journey) constitute at the end of Christian life the sacraments that prepare for our heavenly homeland and complete the earthly pilgrimage.⁴ (CCC 1525) **To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Paul was martyred in Rome in A.D. 67. It required two court sessions before he was finally condemned to death. Because of his Roman citizenship, Paul was beheaded instead of being crucified like Peter, who died in the same year. The sentence was executed three miles outside Rome on the Ostian Way after he had endured the last in the long series of scourgings for Christ that had marked his missionary years.⁷

There is a saying that the Gate of Heaven is so low that you can only enter on your knees!

Luke 18:9-14

Our Lord here rounds off his teaching on prayer: in addition to being persevering and full of faith, prayer must flow from a humble heart, a heart that repents of its sins.

9 Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else.

10 “Two people went up to the temple area to pray; Both of these men went to the temple to pray, they were desiring to draw down upon themselves the good will of God.² one was a Pharisee The Pharisees were very devout and holy disciples of the law. He was by all external appearances, a much better man than the tax collector who belonged to a group of men who deserved the bad name attached to them.³ and the other was a tax collector. Tax collectors were regarded as traitors to their own kind, collecting taxes from their own people in the name of the pagan authorities. The people who heard this parable would be repulsed even by the mention of a tax collector. They would presume that the Pharisee will be praised and the tax collector condemned.³

11 The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, This man addressed God but he spoke to himself. There was no need for vindication from God, he did it himself. I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector.

12 I fast twice a week, Pharisees abstained even from water every Monday and Thursday. and I pay tithes (10%) on my whole income.’ He did more than was required because he only had to pay the tithe on his produce.³ The Pharisee was spiritually self-sufficient. He relied on things, on practices, on observances.

13 But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ This was one of the sources of the ancient Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”⁸ The tax collector relied on God Himself, on His mercy and love. Pride drives away God’s gift of holiness but humility invites it in.¹

14 I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” This exalting or humbling of oneself means, in the last analysis, exclusion from or inclusion in the Kingdom of God. Pride excludes the grace of God and consequently, participation in the Kingdom of God here and hereafter; while contrite self-abasement makes the soul the ready recipient of divine favors for time and eternity.⁹

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst,” (2) “Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings Year C” by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (3) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers Year C: 2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (4) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (5) “The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians And Pastoral Epistles,” (6) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 2 Timothy” by Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J., (7) “The Founding of Christendom” by Warren H. Carroll, (8) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Luke” by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B. (9) “The Parables of Christ” by Charles J. Callan, O.P., (10) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary”, (11) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, and (12) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Habn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.