

6th Sunday In Ordinary Time Year A

Sirach 15:15-20

Sirach, a book which belongs to the collection of writings known as Wisdom literature, was written in Hebrew in the late third to early second century BC by Ben Sira and thought to be his class notes from years of teaching philosophy in Jerusalem. The author is attempting to show how Jewish teachings and traditions offer the wisdom for living life in accord with God's wisdom.² From his social teaching, Sirach now turns to consider individual responsibility. The sinner is fully responsible for his conduct because God, who sees all things, is not the author of wickedness; he gives to every man the liberty to choose between good and evil.¹ This is made clear in verse 14 which precedes today's reading: "When God, in the beginning, created man, he made him subject to his own free choice."¹ In the Douay-Reims translation, this book is known as Ecclesiasticus.⁷

15If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live;

16He has set before you fire and water; to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. We are free to choose, but Sirach makes clear that the choice is not equally weighted on both sides. We are free to choose, but not free to sin. We may be free to choose to sin but our freedom is not a permission to sin.⁵

17Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him. Man shapes his own destiny for weal or for woe.³

18Immense is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power, and all-seeing.

19The eyes of God are on those who fear him; he understands man's every deed.

20No one does he command to act unjustly, to none does he give license to sin. God has no truck with sin except to punish it in full knowledge and justice.³

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

The Christian message is rightly termed a "wisdom," but a God-given wisdom pertaining to man's ultimate destiny through God's power. It is completely unknown to the rulers and great minds of the world.¹ Paul adds to the understanding of divine wisdom by contrasting it with earthly wisdom. He is thinking of the Greek philosophers of his time, but this earthly wisdom could include any world knowledge. The wisdom Paul preaches is not of this age; it does not belong to this or any historical time. The wisdom of earthly rulers is also not the wisdom of which Paul speaks. Like the earthly rulers who will pass away, so their wisdom will also.²

Brothers and sisters:

6We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. Paul has a complex way of putting a simple idea: Be guided by faith in the Spirit of God not merely by human motives.⁶

7Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory,

8and which none of the rulers of this age knew; or, if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. "The rulers of this age" is perhaps a reference to Pilate or Herod or both, who did not know this wisdom, for if they had, Jesus' Crucifixion would not have happened.²

9But as it is written: What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him, This appears to be a quotation from the OT but is more likely simply inspired by Isaiah 6:1-3. Paul is showing us that God's wisdom has

been made known through the Spirit. To those who are receptive, the Holy Spirit will reveal the wisdom of God's plan of salvation in Christ. God's wisdom is within our grasp if we open ourselves to the Spirit.²

¹⁰This God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God.

Matthew 5:17-37

This long passage is from the Sermon On The Mount.⁶ This Sunday and next, the Gospel is Jesus' teaching to his disciples on what exactly it means for them to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They are to flavor the world and shine for others by conducting themselves in a manner that distinguishes them from the scribes and the Pharisees.²

¹⁷Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. This is a shorthand expression for the entire OT.⁴ I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

¹⁸Amen, "Amen" is a solemn oath that the truth is being told.⁷ I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. While sacrificial laws of the OT expired with the sacrifice of Jesus, the moral Law was retained and refined.⁴

¹⁹Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus inaugurates a new and climactic phase in salvation history. He introduces a New Covenant standard of righteousness that surpasses the real, but insufficient righteousness of the Old Covenant.⁴

²¹You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.

²²But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Jesus' response broadens the law to address anger. Anger, including denigrating others by calling them names such as "raqa", Aramaic for "imbecile" or "idiot," can cause harm to others. Jesus calls for reconciliation and the working out of differences before the anger leads one to the court of law or even to Gehenna.²

²³Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you,

²⁴leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Should men yield to anger, which is conceived as unavoidable, the sacred duty of reconciliation arises and that duty is urgent. Even worship must be postponed for reconciliation. It is irrelevant to the duty of reconciliation who started the quarrel.⁷

²⁵Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.

²⁶Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery.

28But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. The restatement of the Law is directed again at the root of the impulse.⁷

29If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna.

30And if your right hand causes you to sin, but it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna. This obviously is not meant to be taken literally.⁷

31It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce. Jesus did not abolish a law in the case of the permission to divorce but abolished a practice which violated, in some measure, the proscriptive law on adultery. In Matthew 19:8, Jesus says specifically that it was Moses (not God) who had allowed divorce by decree “because of your stubbornness...but at the beginning it was not that way.” In so saying, we see Jesus not only acting as a new Moses but correcting Moses and speaking on behalf of God’s original design.⁵

32But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife—unless the marriage is unlawful—causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. The OT commandment which says that a man can give a woman a bill of divorce appears to legitimize divorce as an option. Thus, what Jesus denies is this option. The ideal of marriage, the permanence of the covenantal bond of personal love, he upholds.²

33Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.

34But I say to you, do not swear at all, not by heaven, for it is God’s throne;

35nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

36Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black.

37Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more is from the evil one.” The necessity of an oath is a reflection of the evil condition of man, exhibiting both his tendency to lie, against which the oath is thought to protect, and his distrust of his fellow man. It is better to be known as an honest person who never lies so that no oath is ever needed.⁷

Some of the information above was taken from: (1) "Saint Joseph Edition of The New American Bible", (2) "Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers and Proclaimers of the Word 2011" by Mary A. Eble, PhD, and Margaret Nutting Ralph, PhD, (3) "The Book Of Proverbs and The Book Of Sirach" by Ernest Lussier, S.S.S., (4) "The Gospel of Matthew" Ignatius Catholic Study Bible With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (5) Commentary on the scriptures by Tim Gray, (6) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers 1995" by Aelred Rosser, and (7) St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded by Dr. Scott Hahn.

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