

BIBLE STUDY
October 21, 2019

The Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sirach 35: 12-14, 16-18

Luke 18: 9-14

2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18

1. Sirach 35: 12-14, 16-18

- Part of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament (along with Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Wisdom)
- Also known as Ecclesiasticus ("Church book") and the Wisdom of Ben Sira.
- Sirach is part of the Deutero-canonical or Apocryphal books. They are recognized by Catholics and Orthodox as canonical but not by other Christian communities mainly due to the belief that they were more of Greek than Hebrew origin.
- Both Catholic and Protestant scholars have moved to a more common appreciation of these books with Catholics recognizing their distinctive character and Protestants seeing their value as shedding insight into the faith and spirituality of Jesus' times.
- It is a collection of wise sayings, proverbs, and maxims to assist one in living a godly life.
- Chapter 35 teaches that keeping the commandments and avoiding injustice is a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord.
- Vv 12-13-Give to God as he has given to you. Offerings to God should be made cheerfully and generously. The Lord will repay sevenfold.
- Vv 14-15- do not offer deeds of injustice such as bribes and extortion because God is a God of justice who does not play favorites. In those days, the poor and the oppressed were looked down upon as undeserving of attention. It was thought that riches and prosperity were signs of God's favor and poverty and sickness were signs of God's displeasure.
- V 16-God shows no partiality to the weak but because he is just he hears the cry of those who are oppressed and exploited. God has a "preferential option for the poor." Just as a parent loves all their children equally they also have a special concern for the child who need more help and attention.
- V 17-the widow and the orphan are of special concern to God because they have no one to plead their cause or protect their rights. They were often exploited and taken advantage of by the rich and powerful.
- Vv 18-19- the tears of the oppressed testify against the ones who have caused their pain
- V 20-21-the cry of those who please God pierce the clouds and does not stop until it reaches its goal and it will remain there until God answers

- V 22-God is a just judge who decides rightly for the oppressed. He will not delay. He is like a warrior—he never gives up or stops—until he has brought justice.

2. Luke 18: 9-14

- This parable continues the theme of prayer and addresses the right attitude to have when we pray.
- "Righteousness" in the Bible is living in accordance with the requirements of the covenant. "Being justified" is the verdict that one hopes to receive from God because he/she has shown "righteous behavior." A person "earns" salvation/justification because they do what is right. Some persons such as tax collectors were unwilling or unable to live this righteous lifestyle. They were considered to be "unrighteous" and not justified—approved by God. Jesus preached a forgiving love of God that welcomed even the unrighteous if they were willing to change and be converted. Jesus showed that God understands the inner struggle of a person and does not judge solely on external behavior. God reads the heart.
- This view of righteousness would lead a person to take credit for salvation. To see justification as something they do on their own and something they deserve because of their deeds. Christ's death and resurrection shows that this justification is a gift of God that is freely given. It does not depend on our deeds but on the desire of our hearts. God freely grants forgiveness and healing for our shortcomings and sins. Our righteous deeds are our grateful response to God's generous gift.
- The Pharisee "took up his position"—presumably in the front of the temple at a position of honor
- The attitude of the Pharisee is that he is better than everybody else. His righteousness is based on his own efforts. He does what the law says like fasting and tithing. He looks down on everybody who is not as good as he is. In particular he looks down upon this tax collector, judging him and presuming to know all about him.
- The parable says that "he spoke this prayer to himself." Prayer is talking to God. The Pharisee is talking to himself. Prayer for the Pharisee is his giving God an update on how well he is doing.
- The tax collector is totally different. He stands off at a distance—a lowly position. He keeps his eyes lowered in a humble stance. He beats his breast—a sign of sorrow and contrition. He acknowledges his sinfulness and asks for mercy. Mercy is God's free gift. He knows he does not deserve it. He pleads for God's help.
- We never know what a person is going through. We don't know what lead the tax collector to this unsavory profession. Is it the only way he can support his family? Does he have no other choice? Is it a result of a chain of bad decisions? Is he being extorted himself? Does he desperately want to change but feels God would never forgive him? Does he think he is a lost cause?
- Jesus says that the tax collector's prayer has been heard and he has been justified. The Pharisee's prayer has not been heard and he is not justified.

- We should not conclude that this Pharisee is representative of all Pharisees or that this was the typical behavior of Pharisees. In the Gospels, the Pharisee is representative of this negative aspect of religious people—pride, false superiority, judgmental attitude, self-righteousness. We all can be a Pharisee.
- This is another example of reversal in Luke's Gospel. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. Jesus is pleading with people to align themselves with the lowly and the poor so that when the Day of Judgement comes they will be in the right position to benefit from it.
- Prayer is not our telling God how things are but our letting God communicate to us God's desire of how life and reality should be.
- The parable asks us if we truly need God in our lives or do we think that we are self-sufficient and doing fine on our own.

3. 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18

- As Paul looks toward the end of his life as he sits in prison, he sees his life as a sacrifice offered to God. He is poured out as a libation—the offering of blood in the rite of sacrifice.
- In speaking of his death as a departure, he uses a word that is associated with the loosing of a ship from its moorings so that it can set sail.
- He looks back over his life as a race that he is almost completing. The persistence and endurance of a runner is symbolic of his keeping the faith throughout his life.
- The winner of a race receives a crown of laurel leaves. Paul will receive the crown of righteousness from God who is a just judge. Not only Paul but all who have persevered will be rewarded.
- Paul then looks upon his life from another perspective. He regrets that those he depended upon did not come through for him and defend him. But, God stood by him and did not abandon him. God gave him strength to fulfill his mission of preaching the Gospel to all, especially the Gentiles.
- God saved him “from the lion’s mouth.” God will continue to rescue him from every danger and threat and bring him safely home to heaven.