

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

Jesus Ben Sirach, the wise and perceptive scribe of Jerusalem, writes movingly of the chief loves of his life: the Law and the Temple liturgy. He also shows a touching devotion to the great figures of Israel's past. He gives us a pithy collection of reflections, mostly on worldly wisdom, good behavior, tact and good sense. But he insists that Wisdom comes from God, mediated through the Law. He always has death, the moment of reckoning, before his eyes, though he gives no clear teaching about the after-life or what the reward for good works will be.

The "Wisdom of Ben Sirach" was originally written in Hebrew, but, as the forward says, it was translated into Greek by the author's grandson in 132 B.C. Jesus Ben Sirach wrote about 190-180 B.C. Sirach is the only book of Holy Scripture which contains a forward (which is not considered inspired).

12 For he is a God of justice, who knows no favorites. 13 Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.

The poor and powerless enjoy a special love and concern of the Lord.

14 He is not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint;

God hears the cry of the poor, the orphan, the widows Bthese are privileged characters in the Bible (see Exodus 22:21-23, Deuteronomy 24:17-18; Proverbs 23:10-11).

16 He who serves God willingly is heard;

"Willingly" is the key word – service because of duty, obligation, or habit is not sufficient – it must be willing service.

his petition reaches the heavens. 17 The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal, 18 Nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds,

"It" is the prayer of the lowly, the humble.

judges justly and affirms the right.

2nd Reading - 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Today we wind up our study of 2nd Timothy as we hear Paul's closing remarks. Recall that this letter is written as instruction and encouragement to Timothy, whom Paul installed as Bishop of Ephesus. Timothy has been having difficulties with false teachers and Paul provides pastoral guidance while he himself is held prisoner in Rome. This letter is believed to have been written in A.D. 67 with Paul being martyred in A.D. 67 or 68. The place of his martyrdom in local Roman tradition is the site of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. Since he was a Roman citizen, the mode of execution according to the same tradition was decapitation

⁶ For I am already being poured out like a libation,

A libation is a sacrificial rite in which a liquid (usually wine or oil) was poured out on the altar.

and the time of my departure is at hand.

Paul's death is near at hand. He is handing on his legacy to Timothy and other future leaders.

⁷ I have competed well; I have finished the race;

Paul's letters are full of athletic imagery: races, fights, etc. These images are used to exhort the reader to keep his attention focused on the prize which goes to the winner; the victor's crown which is awarded by the chief judge.

I have kept the faith.

Paul has preserved and guarded the deposit of faith.

⁸ From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day,

The parousia, the day of judgment

and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance.

All who out of love for Christ have lived a Christian life as a preparation for their appearance at the judgment.

¹⁶ At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me.

It is possible that Paul is referring to his Roman house arrest, but more likely he alludes to a first hearing in his present trial.

“Story has it that the apostle, after defending himself, was again sent upon the ministry of preaching and coming a second time to the same city met death by martyrdom under Nero. While he was being held in prison, he composed the second epistle to Timothy, at the same time indicating that his first defense had taken place and that martyrdom was at hand.” [Eusebius Pamphilus of Caesarea (between A.D. 300-325), *History of the Church* 2,22]

May it not be held against them! ¹⁷ But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it.

Assuming that the first hearing was at his present trial, Paul was successful in preaching the Gospel before the judges and all those present for the occasion.

And I was rescued from the lion’s mouth.

A biblical image (Psalm 22:21; Daniel 6:22).

¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat

Paul is not referring to release from his present imprisonment, he will be rescued for the heavenly kingdom.

and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel - Luke 18:9-14

As we proceed from our gospel reading last week which presented Jesus’ first parable on prayer, we now hear the second parable on prayer. Recall that the question has often been put to Jesus “When and how will the end come?” Jesus’ answer is always that we are to persevere in prayer and humility. These two parables (the one we heard last week and this one) appear only in Luke and in this one we are reminded that our virtuous works what we are proud of will not earn us entrance into God’s kingdom.

⁹ He [Jesus] then 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;

The hours of prayer were 9 A.M. and 3 P.M.

one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.

The Pharisees were completely “just” before the Law, that is why they had such confidence in themselves. Tax collectors were always considered to be sinners.

11 The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, 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, and I pay tithes on my whole income.’

The Pharisee carefully spells out why he is just, just in case God hadn’t noticed.

13 But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast

A sign of repentance and mourning

and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ 14 I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The tax collector is forgiven of his sins because of his humble repentance. He has recognized his need of God’s mercy and has shown sorrow for his sins. The Pharisee, however, does not need God’s justification because he has justified himself (once saved, always saved?).