

22nd Sunday In Ordinary Time - 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 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

In older Catholic Bibles, this book is listed as Ecclesiasticus, meaning “Church Book.” It received this name from the fact that, after the Psalms, it was the book most used in the liturgy; in fact, in the early Church it was a kind of official catechism used in the catechumenate.

The author of the book is Jesus, the son of Eleazar, of the house of Sirach. His home was Jerusalem, his profession that of a teacher of wisdom. From his youth he had been an ardent student of the Sacred Books of his people. Although he belonged to what might be called the conservative party among the Jews of his time, and clung with every fiber of his heart to the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets of Israel, he was not unfamiliar with Greek thought and life. This was to be expected because he had traveled extensively, not only in Palestine, but far beyond its limits. He describes his education at home and abroad in Sirach 39:1-13.

Jesus Ben Sirach wrote his book during the first decades of the 2nd century before Christ, probably not earlier than 187 BC and not later than 171 BC. During this period the Jewish nation and the Jewish religion were threatened with extinction. A life and death struggle was waging between the Hellenistic culture predominant in Syria and Egypt and the old religion of the Israelites. Greek manners and customs, Greek philosophy and religion, which were so utterly opposed to the true religion revealed by God to His chosen people, were taking root in the Holy City itself. It was a critical time for the faithful worshipers of Yahweh. Every Jew was called upon to choose between the old and the new, the spirit of Moses and the Prophets, and the spirit of Hellenistic heathenism. Jesus Ben Sirach had long since made his choice. To justify that choice before his countrymen and to instill into them a thorough knowledge and love of their glorious heritage – this was the purpose of this book.

Today, our reading gives us a lesson in humility.

¹⁷ My son [child], conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.

Be conscious of your limitations and your true position before God as a creature and sinner.

¹⁸ Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God.

The high and mighty have a greater need to be humble than the lowly and weak.

²⁰ What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not. ²⁸ The mind of a sage appreciates proverbs, and an attentive ear is the wise man’s joy.

The author includes himself here. Faithful disciples are a joy to the master.

²⁹ Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins.

2nd Reading - Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24

Today we end our study of the Book of Hebrews. Having heard last week about how we are to live out our faith and God's treatment of His sons, today we hear a contrast between the assembly of Israel when the Old Covenant was made and that of those who have entered into the New.

¹⁸ You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm ¹⁹ and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them.

This scene is on earth and the awesome circumstances recounted are taken from Exodus 19:12-14, 16-19; 20:18-21, and Moses' words in Deuteronomy 4:11f.

²² No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,

See Galatians 4:26, Revelation 21:2. The assembly of the people of the New Covenant is not on this earth, but in the heavenly sanctuary. The author is speaking to those who are still on the journey to the final reward. Since they already possess the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice, he can speak of them as having already arrived. This assumes that they have been living the life of Christ and will continue to do so as we learned last week.

and countless angels in festal gathering, ²³ and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven,

These may be the angels just mentioned or the entire assembly of the Christian faithful.

and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect,

The saints of the Old Testament. See Hebrews 11:40.

²⁴ and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.

This recalls the slaying of Abel by Cain and God's conversation with Cain immediately afterward. Read Genesis 4:10.

Gospel - Luke 14:1, 7-14

In today's reading Jesus uses the occasion of a meal and the attendant social etiquette to teach

– not about good manners at table, but about the Kingdom. Attendance at the heavenly banquet depends upon an invitation from God. God invites those who recognize their lowliness and their need of salvation.

^{14:1} On a sabbath he went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. ⁷ He told a parable to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table. ⁸ “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, ⁹ and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, ‘My friend, move up to a higher position.’ Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,

God will not be fooled by one’s self-promotion.

but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” ¹² Then he said to the host who invited him, “When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. ¹³ Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind;

In Jesus’ and Luke’s time both Jewish and Greco-Roman society spurned the unfortunate people.

¹⁴ blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.

The Greco-Roman ethic was one of reciprocity; where friends come to one another’s aid in the hope that when they are down on their luck their friend will come to their aid. In Luke’s communities people from all different walks of life and from different nations are friends because they have all things in common.

For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

This reading makes it clear that the righteous to be repaid at the resurrection are those who have shared the food of life with the disadvantaged.