

September 1st, 2019, 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

This book is also called “Ecclesiasticus” and it was written about 190 B.C. Many of the proverbs in this book were used to train the sons of the wealthy in proper court behavior. Most of the intended audience had both wealth and status.⁶

17My child, conduct your affairs with humility, Humility is the call to servanthood, it is totally opposite of one who is selfish. A humble person is one who is selfless and thinks of others more than of himself. This is what Christ preached, believed, and lived. Being humble is a guard against selfishness, prejudice and jealousy,¹ as well as pride, vanity, violence, meanness and presumption. Companions to humility are: truth, gentleness, goodness and submission to God.³ Showing genuine interest in others is one way to cultivate this virtue.¹ Humility is the consciousness of our limitations and true position before God as a creature and sinner, even though true humility is TRUTH and proper self-esteem is part of it.² **and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.** This first proverb is saying that a humble wealthy man will be more loved than a proud one who gives gifts to others.⁶

18Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, Humility is especially important for those of higher rank and social standing.² **and you will find favor with God.** This second proverb insists that the greater a person is, the more humility he or she needs.⁶ Truly great leaders with power at their command exercise their influence with humility—and therefore do not need to call upon the power they have.⁷

20What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not. This is a part of humility. It is not anti-intellectual, but is meant to keep one from philosophizing in such a way that it would obscure the clear light of God’s revelation.⁴ This third proverb reminds us that true humility is a matter of recognizing the truth about ourselves—knowing our limitations and our status before God.⁶ The story is told of the old man named Zasha who was very close to death. His son approached him and asked if he was fearful of appearing before the judgment seat of God. He said, “No, I am not afraid for God will only judge me on how well I have done as Zasha. He will not compare me to the patriarchs nor to the prophets. He will not judge me as a rabbi. He will only look into my heart and see how well I have done as Zasha.”

28The mind of a sage appreciates proverbs, This is the opposite of the proud man who is stubborn and obstinate in not following the guidance of others.⁴ **and an attentive ear is the joy of the wise.**

29Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins. Charity to the poor and afflicted atones for sin. While we usually associate “alms” with the giving of money, the Catholic Almanac defines alms as “an act, gift or service of compassion motivated by love of God and neighbor, for the help of persons in need; an obligation of charity, which is measurable by the ability of one person to give assistance and by the degree of another’s need. Almsgiving, along with prayer and fasting is regarded as a work of penance as well as an exercise of charity.” This would include the corporal and spiritual works of mercy!⁵

Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a

Brothers and sisters:

18You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm The writer contrasts the new covenant with the old covenant, encouraging his readers to rejoice in the differences. The signs of the old covenant were material (touchable); those of the new

covenant are spiritual. The signs of the old covenant provoked feelings of awe and trepidation; those of the new prompt us to peace and joy.⁷

19and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words These are the physical signs that accompanied the manifestation of God on the heights of Sinai. (Exodus 19:12-16; 20:18) **such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them.** All of the above details inspired feelings of religious reverence and fear which explains why the people begged God not to speak further, for they were afraid they would die.⁹

22No, you have approached Mount Zion There were many prophecies that proclaimed that the Messiah's reign would begin on Zion, his holy mountain and so "Mount Zion," "the city of the living God," and "the heavenly Jerusalem" all mean the Church in triumph in heaven.⁹ **and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering,**

23and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, These are the blessed including the righteous of the Old Testament, the Apostles and all Christians who have attained the beatific vision. They are called first-born because, in the case of the Patriarchs, they were the first to have faith; in the case of the Apostles, it was they who received Christ's call initially; in the case of faithful Christians, they were chosen by God from among the pagans. Their names are written in heaven.⁹ **and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect,** St. Thomas emphasizes that part of eternal happiness in heaven consists in the vision of the heavenly assembly: "for in the glory of heaven there are two things which most cause the blessed to rejoice — enjoyment of the Godhead and the fellowship of the saints."⁹

24aand Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, As Incarnate Word and High Priest, Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant.⁹ **and the sprinkled blood** The "sprinkled blood" connotes the death of Jesus interpreted as a covenant sacrifice. (See the ratification of the Sinai Covenant in Exodus 24:3-8.) **that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.** The image of Abel's talking blood comes from Genesis. After Cain murdered Abel, Genesis reports that God asked, "Where is your brother Abel?" Compounding the crime of murder with a lie, Cain replies, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" God retorts, "What have you done! Listen: your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil!" (Genesis 4:9-10) The spilling of the blood of Christ is more eloquent than that of Abel, because Abel's called for vengeance whereas Jesus shed his blood on behalf of all, even his killers.⁸ Here we have a contrast between the establishment of the covenant on Sinai and the vision of the heavenly city, the dwelling-place of the angels and saints. What awaits us is not an austere and vengeful God as perceived by the Israelites, but, rather, the joy and splendor of the heavenly city. It is not God who has changed, but we have been changed and brought into closer union with God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.⁷

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Once again Luke finds Jesus at table, but not with social outcasts this time. Here he dines with religious leaders and takes the opportunity to teach some important qualities of discipleship and holiness.⁷ The point of this parable is humility, but not just as a social virtue. The wedding banquet is a symbol of the kingdom. Those who are invited to the banquet must abandon any pride or claim of merit. None of us deserves to be saved; none of us can earn salvation. The host, God, will decide each person's place in the kingdom.⁶

1On a Sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. Jesus was the object of his enemies' constant surveillance.¹⁰ These people had a fixed grudge against Jesus and were lying in wait to trap him in what he said.¹⁴ This was made clear in Luke 11:53-54.

7He told a parable It is the nature of parables that they use one situation to examine a second, different situation. The meaning of the word “parable” reveals how it works: to lay one thing alongside another and draw parallels. If we interpret parables literally, we interpret them wrongly.⁷ **to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table.** Jesus was also observing them very closely.

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, The place of honor was next to the host and his place was at the middle or center of the table. The tables were horseshoe in shape, and the guests reclined on couches, resting on their left sides around the three parts of the table and helping themselves with their free right hand. The open space within the sides of the table was for the servants. Sometimes a host would reserve the first place of honor for a guest of special distinction who might be late in arriving, and the other places would be filled meanwhile according to order of rank. If an imprudent person were to usurp this reserved place, he would be obliged to surrender it upon the arrival of the one for whom it had been intended, and then in shame and embarrassment go and take the last place, since all the other places would have been filled before.¹⁵ **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.

10Rather, 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. Jesus is not teaching social etiquette, but from good manners at table he draws conclusions about the kingdom.¹⁴ This is a lesson on humility, one of the faces of love,³ where greatness is measured by concern for others and a modest estimation of self. It is dishonorable to presume that one’s position, social or otherwise, will automatically win the favor of God.¹⁰

11For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Humility was regarded by Hellenistic moralists as a vice, not a virtue. It is a distinctively Christian virtue widely attested in the NT writings reflecting the experience of a lowly savior.¹⁴ It is not our own efforts that save us and give us life; it is the grace of God and it is He who assigns the places at the heavenly banquet.¹³

12Then 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. There is Semitic exaggeration in the statement that one should not invite friends, relatives, and neighbors. The kingdom is for everyone, and our hospitality is to embrace all, especially those who are overlooked by people with only selfish motives.¹²

13Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; The blind and the lame were forbidden entrance to the temple.⁶ The lame, blind and crippled are excluded from the priesthood in Leviticus. At Qumran these disqualifications were extended to exclusion from the Holy War of the end-time and even from participation in the eschatological banquet. “Poor” is a blanket term for all these marginalized people.¹⁴ In our relationship to God, “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” describes all of us.⁷

14blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” God will look favorably on works of mercy at the time of judgment at the general resurrection.¹⁰ The resurrection of the dead was held as a truth by the Pharisees.¹¹

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study Cycle C” by Deacon Ken e³ Marie Finn, (2) “Jerome Biblical Commentary”, (3) “Saint Joseph Commentary on the Sunday Readings Year C” by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (4) “The Book of Proverbs and The Book of Sirach” by Ernest Lussier, S.S.S., (5) “1995 Catholic Almanac,” (6) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, (7) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (8) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2007” by James L. Weaver, (9) “The Navarre Bible: HEBREWS”, (10)

“Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. DmcKenzie, S.J., (12) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Luke” by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., (13) “The Navarre Bible: ST LUKE”, (14) “The Gospel of Luke” by Luke Timothy Johnson, and (15) “The Parables of Christ” by Charles J. Callan, O.P.,

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