

Holy Family Of Jesus, Mary, And Joseph Cycle A (December 29th, 2019)

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

This is one of the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. The author, Jesus, son of Eleazar, was a pious and learned Jew who lived in Jerusalem in the second century B.C. and was actually the grandson of Sirach, a prominent teacher for whom the book is named. The book is a collection of sayings that teach the way of life that flows from fidelity to God. Our reading is taken from the section which discusses a variety of virtues, beginning first with duties toward one's parents.² The author sees the authority of parents over their children as deriving from God's own authority. For the Jews, the bond between parents and children was not merely one of mutual obligation or even affection, as good as those are. One's connection to one's parents established one's claims to the covenant promises of God. Honoring one's father and mother brings with it a number of spiritual and material benefits, which were believed to come through the covenant and one's parents represented the source of that covenant relationship with God. Parents were important because they demonstrated one's link to the covenant going back through the generations of Israel. Genealogies, such as the ones we see for Jesus in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, were maintained to demonstrate these covenant claims. For a Jew, failing to honor one's parents was the covenantal equivalent of cutting off the branch one hoped to sit on.¹

2God sets a father in honor over his children; The foundation of the family was traditionally the father and he had the place of honor. He was given the right to be respected and obeyed by his family.² **a mother's authority he confirms over her sons.** The duty of children toward their parents is one of Israel's most sacred laws and one of the Ten Commandments. It was held in high respect by Jews at all times.⁶

3Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and preserves himself from them. This goes beyond the Fourth commandment by promising ATONEMENT for sin and PRESERVATION from sin. Through respect, the child forms its religious attitude toward God. Respect for parents educates the mind and heart to exercise the first and fundamental respect due to God.⁷ No excuse dispenses from this law; he who violates it is like a blasphemer.⁴ Children who respect their parents are not only doing God's will, but also are storing up spiritual rewards for themselves. Over the centuries it has been shown that children who respect their parents generally have children who will respect their parents.²

4When he prays, he is heard; he stores up riches who reveres his mother.

5Whoever honors his father is gladdened by children, and when he prays, is heard. Note that all prayer is heard. We may not get exactly what we ask for but if we did, we would be god and He would be the one to do what he is told...Prayer is very important for a family's growth. The Catechism says that daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen the family in charity.⁵

6Whoever reveres his father will live a long life; he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother. He who respects his parents is respecting and obeying God who is mysteriously represented by our parents.¹ Children also have an obligation to come to their parents' assistance spiritually by summoning a priest to minister to them in sickness, by praying that they may persevere in grace or return to that state, and by praying for the repose of their soul after death.³

12My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives. The requirement of obedience toward parents ceases when children become adults, live independently or marry, but not so respect, which is always owed to them. This respect has its roots in the fear of the Lord (an awe of God's presence), which is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁵ Acts of hatred, ill

will, personal injury and contempt, which might be venially sinful when directed against strangers, very easily become mortal sins when directed against one's parents.³

13Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him; revile him not all the days of his life.

14kindness to a father will not be forgotten, firmly planted against THE DEBT OF YOUR SINS.

This was a big deal because the act of sacrificing a sin offering was a public admission of guilt.—a house raised in justice to you. This kindness will take “root” and bear fruit in future generations.

The call to love, honor, and respect your parents carries with it the reward of your children's care for you in your old age as well as their love and respect... This book is no longer included in the Hebrew scriptures, nor is it included in the canon of sacred writings recognized by Christian denominations other than Catholic. But we have always drawn extensively from Sirach in our liturgical texts and catechesis, so much so, in fact, that the book goes by another name:

Ecclesiasticus, which means “the church book.”⁸

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Colossians 3:12-21

Paul wrote this letter while imprisoned in Rome. He was told by Epaphras, a faithful disciple and a hard-working pastor of several churches including Colossae, that recent converts to the Christian faith were being disturbed by false teachers. Paul's letter spells out some very practical rules for the Christians.²

Brothers and sisters:

12Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, What follows is a brief description of the Christian community life a member embraces through his baptism. The employment of terms used to describe Israel of old (chosen, holy, beloved) stresses that they are entering the new Israel, a new community of God's people and that their relations to one another should reflect this.⁴ heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, Some of these virtues would be extolled by non-Christians too, but humility and gentleness (sometimes translated as “meekness”) were considered vices among the pagans, not virtues.¹¹ These virtues are hard to define, but they are basically “other centered” not self centered. and patience. Putting on the new nature is not just an external action, like putting on different clothes. It is a transfiguration involving the whole person—soul and body, mind and will. This interior change begins to operate when one makes a firm resolution to lead a fully Christian life; but it calls for an on-going effort, day in day out, to practice all the virtues. “Conversion is something momentary; sanctification is the work of a lifetime.”⁹

13bearing with one another and forgiving one another, Forgiveness was a main virtue of a Christian, and this is what separated him from the non-believer.² if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. When we realize that everything that we have comes from God, then we can be understanding toward our neighbor and we can forgive him as often as needs be. The petition from the Our father was probably on Paul's mind.⁴

14And over all these put on love, Charity is the belt which keeps everything together. Without it the other virtues would fall apart.⁹ That is, the bond of perfection. All of the virtues that were mentioned above would fall apart if it weren't for charity. St. Francis de sales explains it: “Without cement and mortar, which knits the bricks together and strengthens the walls, the entire building is bound to collapse; a human body would simply disintegrate unless it had nerves, muscles and tendons; and if charity were absent, virtues simply could not stay together.” Blessed Escriva advises that “if we want to achieve holiness—in spite of personal shortcomings and miseries which will last

as long as we live—we must make an effort, with God’s grace, to practice charity, which is the fullness of the law and the bond of perfection.”⁹

15And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. This is not a peace that the world can give. As St. Augustine puts it: “Thou has made us for thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in thee.” Pope John XXIII makes it clear that “Peace on earth, which men of every era have most eagerly yearned for, can be firmly established only if the order laid down by God is dutifully observed.”⁹...Christ’s peace must reign not only in our hearts but among the members of the community. Peace is more than serene feelings: it means that we are in right relationships with God, creation, and all people. And all that God has done for us should lead us to constant thanksgiving.¹¹ **And be thankful.**

16Let the word of Christ, This is the whole body of our Lord’s teachings, which are found in the books of the New Testament. St. John Chrysostom says that these writings “are teachers which never cease to instruct us...Open these books. What a treasury of good remedies they contain!... All you need do is look at the book, read it and remember well the wise teachings therein. The source of all our evils is our ignorance of the sacred books!”⁹ The word of Christ is real nourishment for our prayer life. **dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another.** “One another” is repeated three times in this section emphasizing that responsibilities are mutual.⁴ **Singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.** Our appreciation should lead us to glorify the Lord with songs of joy and gratitude. We can use ready-made hymns for this purpose, and also the Psalms, which the Church has always used in its liturgy to praise God and to nourish the spiritual life. “Just as the mouth savors good food, so does the heart savor the Psalms” according to St. Bernard.⁹

17And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, All things should be done as perfectly as possible for the love of God. This was the essence of the “Little Way” of St. Therese. The founder of Opus Dei expressed it: “The Christian vocation consists in making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge, my children, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.”⁹ **giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

18Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord. An interesting insight into this is that the Church is seen as the bride of Christ and she must ever be submissive to Him.¹...Pope John Paul II exhorts spouses to a revolutionary understanding of this section from St. Paul. He says that “submission in Christian marriage is *mutual and modeled not according to lust and domination, but according to the image of Christ and his Church.*”¹⁰

19Husbands, love your wives, At the time of this writing, a wife had no rights and was considered the property of her husband. Paul’s call to “love your wife” brings her into equality and a full sharing in the authority of the family.² **and avoid any bitterness toward them.**

20Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Obviously, for a child’s obedience to “please the Lord” it must not involve doing anything that is opposed to God’s will, for Jesus taught that “he who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me”(Mt 10:37).⁹

21Fathers, do not provoke your children so they may not become discouraged. Christ’s self-sacrificing love for others is now the model for home life. In Ephesians 6:4 Paul goes on to say that Fathers are responsible for the religious education and training of their children.

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

We have to look at both Luke and Matthew to figure out the Infancy narrative. According to the Mosaic law, a woman who had delivered a male child was to present herself in the Temple for purification 40 days after the birth and also to consecrate a firstborn son to the Lord, and then redeem him for five shekels. Thus, in all likelihood, Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem 40 days after the birth of Christ and fulfilled both prescriptions of the law. They then probably returned to Bethlehem where they were living in a house when the Magi arrived. The Presentation would have taken place before the arrival of the Wise Men and the flight into Egypt.¹²... The life of Moses has many parallels with that of Jesus such as: the Pharaoh was a wicked king of Egypt who decreed that Moses and all other Jewish boy babies were to be killed but Moses was saved. The adult Moses fled to Midian and after Pharaoh's death he returned to Egypt when all the men who were seeking his life had died.¹⁶

¹³When the magi had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream This is his second dream. In the first dream the angel told him to take Mary as his wife. and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. From the time of the Maccabees, Egypt had been a customary place of refuge.¹³ Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him."

¹⁴Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night This was not only because they were more likely to slip away in the darkness unnoticed, but also because Joseph received his command while he slept and he did not delay his obedience.¹⁴ and departed for Egypt. The trip was about 12 days traveling on hard roads with cold lonely nights and very little comfort.²

¹⁵He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, Out of Egypt I called my son. This citation is from Hosea 11. Just as God called Israel out of Egypt to create a people peculiarly his own, so he called Jesus out of Egypt into the land of Israel to accomplish his purpose of creating the new Israel or people of God.¹³

¹⁹When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph This is the third dream. in Egypt and said,

²⁰"Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." The Gospels do not give us the exact duration of this sojourn in Egypt, but Ricciotti estimates that their stay may have been only a few months.¹²

²¹He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. History tells us that Archelaus was ambitious and cruel like his father. By the time Joseph returned from Egypt, the new ruler was quite notorious.¹⁵ Joseph took Mary and the Child north to the district of Galilee where Archelaus' younger brother, Herod Antipas, ruled.¹⁷ And because he had been warned in a dream, This is the fourth dream. he departed for the region of Galilee.

²³He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, He shall be called a Nazorean. The town of Nazareth was never mentioned in the Old Testament by any of the prophets. This seems to be an obscure reference to Isaiah 11:1 which reads, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." The word for "branch" is a rarely used Hebrew word "netser" which is the base word for "Nazareth". Isaiah used the image of a branch growing from a stump to signify hope for the kingdom of David. The great Davidic tree (dynasty) had been cut off since the Exile, but the sprouting branch indicated that God would raise up another king from the hopeless situation.¹⁷

(1) *Commentary notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray*, (2) *“The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study: Cycle C”* by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (3) *“Responding To God”* Prepared by the Dominicans of the Central Province of St. Albert the Great, (4) *“The Jerome Biblical Commentary,”* (5) *“The Catechism Of The Catholic Church,”* (6) *“The Book of Sirach”* by Ernest Lussier, S.S.S. (7) *“Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings Year C”* by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (8) *“Workbook for lectors and gospel readers Year C: 2004”* by Aelred R. Rosser, (9) *“The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,”* (10) *“Theology of the Body for Beginners”* by Christopher West, (11) *“Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999”* by Lawrence E. Mick, (12) *“The Life of Christ”* by Giuseppe Ricciotti, (13) *“St. Joseph Edition of The New American Bible,”* (14) *“Fire Of Mercy, Heart Of The Word”* by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, (15) *“The Navarre Bible: St. Matthew,”* and (16) *“The Gospel of Matthew”* by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and (17) *“Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew.”*

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