

Holy Family Sunday , Year C

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

This is one of the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. The author was a pious and learned Jew who lived in Jerusalem in the second century B.C. He wrote it in Hebrew and it was later translated into Greek by the author's grandson. He wrote a collection of sayings to help others live their lives in accordance with God's Holy Word. In today's passage he speaks of family.² The section from which our reading is taken discusses a variety of virtues, beginning first with duties toward one's parents. 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 of 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. 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 (CCC 2205)

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 (CCC 2217) 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 —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.⁸

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, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 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 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

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.** 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.” Bl. 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

15 **And 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 **And be thankful.** For this one body, this community, they must always be thankful.¹¹

16 **Let 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 **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

17 **And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,** For Paul and the early Church, to say “do it in the name of the Lord” was a way of designating Christians. In the Old Testament “those who call on the name of the Lord” was a designation of sincere and pious Israelites; in the New Testament it is transferred to Christians (1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 9:14), and the object of it is Christ. The title once reserved for Yahweh has been transferred to Christ.¹² 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.**

18 **Wives, 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.** Man and woman have different, although complimentary, roles in family life; they are equal in dignity. The family needs a center of authority, and that authority belongs to the husband, in accordance with God's design. (1 Cor. 11:3, 12-14)

20Children, obey your parents in everything, (That is not sinful) **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. The Catechism says that parents have the responsibility for the education of their children first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule.⁵ (CCC 2223)

Luke 2:41-52

*Only Luke reports the event of the Child Jesus being lost and then found in the Temple, which we contemplate in the fifth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary.*¹⁵

41Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, Jewish males were expected to travel to Jerusalem for three feasts each year: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The distance the Holy Family would have traveled from Nazareth to Jerusalem is about 85 miles by road.¹² The yearly participation of Mary and Joseph highlights their faithfulness to God's Law.¹³ Passover was also called the feast of "unleavened bread." It was celebrated for a week in the spring.¹⁴

42and when he was twelve years old, At twelve, Jesus is one year younger than the age at which he will reach official manhood. He is still a boy but is about to become a man. This whole passage is a kind of bridge between the story of his birth and his adult work.¹⁷ **they went up according to festival custom.** The rabbis were not in agreement whether or not women and children were required to make the pilgrimage, but males aged twelve and over were required to make it.¹²

43After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Friends and neighbors would travel to Jerusalem in large groups, so it was not unreasonable to assume that Jesus was with the group.¹⁷

44Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, Entire villages joined in the pilgrimages,

breaking up into two groups: one of men, the other of women. Children could go with either group. This explains how they could go a day's journey before they discovered the Child was missing when the families regrouped to camp.¹²

45but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.

46After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, The fact that He was sitting in the midst of the doctors (teachers) would indicate that they received Him not just as a learner, but as a professor.¹⁶ **listening to them and asking them questions,** Jewish religious instruction often involved posing questions and wrestling with them in the light of Scripture. Jesus' insights as a boy astonished even the learned rabbis. Allegorically, St. Ambrose suggests that the discovery of Jesus in the Temple prefigures his Resurrection, when Christ will be three days absent in death, only to be found again in the flesh. The anxiety following his burial will likewise give way to joy and relief at his rising.¹³

47and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. It was not his youth but the depth of his thoughts that amazed the teachers. He was so wise and well-informed. He was, in effect, teaching the teachers.¹²

48When his parents saw him they were astonished, They were probably astonished because of the learning which He displayed. The astonishment may also have derived from the fact that it is sometimes difficult for a mother to realize that a son grows quickly into man's estate and asserts his own individual purpose in life.¹⁶ **and his mother said to him: "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety."**

49And he said to them, These are the first words of Jesus that are recorded in the Gospel.¹² **"Why were you looking for me? Did you not know** Jesus is not rebuking Mary and Joseph, as though they had done something wrong, but instructing them on how their parental role must be subordinate to the will of his divine father. His parents do have an important part to play in his mission, as indicated in the subsequent context, where Jesus submits himself to their leadership and honors them with the faithful obedience of a son.¹³ **that I must be in my Father's house?"** This was the first of many "musts" that Our Blessed Lord uttered during His life to indicate that He was under a mandate, under obedience to be a ransom.¹⁶ This could refer to the Temple specifically or to his mission from the Father more generally.¹³ St. Bede wrote that Jesus teaches us that over and above any human authority, even that of our parents, there is the primary duty to do the will of God.

50But they did not understand what he said to them. Mary and Joseph realized that His reply contained a deeper meaning, which they did not grasp. They did not understand the full implication of what divine Sonship entailed, that His relationship to God takes precedence over His relationship to them.¹² They grew to understand it as the life of their child unfolded.¹⁵

51He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; They had a normal family life. Our Lord's whole life is an example for us including these hidden years which he spent working side by side with ordinary men. This is the last reference to St. Joseph in the Gospels and is a beautiful tribute to him; obedient to his guidance, Jesus grew to perfect manhood.¹² Our Lord wants many people to ratify their vocation during years of quiet, unspectacular living. Obeying God's will always means leaving our selfishness behind.¹⁵ **and his mother kept all these things in her heart.** The parents too will progress in wisdom and understanding as Mary keeps these things in her memory.

52And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man. Jesus grew and matured gradually under the guidance of Joseph and Mary, to whom he was obedient.¹⁷

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (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: 1999" by Lawrence 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) Charles Borromeo Scripture Studies Online, (13) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of LUKE" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (14) "Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of LUKE" by Luke Timothy Johnson, (15) "The Navarre Bible: ST LUKE", (16) "Life of Christ" by Fulton J. Sheen, and (17) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick.

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