

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

A reading from the Book of Sirach:

My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God. What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not. The mind of a sage appreciates proverbs, and an attentive ear is the joy of the wise. Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 68:4-5, 6-7, 10-11

God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

The just rejoice and exult before God; they are glad and rejoice. Sing to God, chant praise to his name; whose name is the Lord.

God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

The father of orphans and the defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling. God gives a home to the forsaken; he leads forth prisoners to prosperity.

God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

A bountiful rain you showered down, O God, upon your inheritance; you restored the land when it languished; your flock settled in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided it for the needy.

God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews:

Brothers and sisters: You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them. No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 14:1, 7-14

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

On a sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. He told a parable to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table. "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, 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. 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. For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." 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. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 22nd Sunday of the Year

The book of Sirach is a collection of poems and adages and is part of the bible's wisdom books. Today's reading has several wise sayings. It began with the advice for humility and to become more humble. What is humility? It is to live life in God's love without arrogance. It is to see ourselves as God sees us; in the truth of who we really are, good and bad. To know our talents, intelligence and abilities as well as our flaws, weaknesses and poor judgment is the definition of being humble. This is the biblical sense of humility and being humble. It is to know our need for God and God's grace. When we know this, we know God who is great. What Sirach has described is a life deeply rooted in a relationship with God. All our goodness comes from God, in whose image and likeness we live.

The word sublime is curious. As a verb, it is to cause to pass directly from the solid to the vapor state and condense back to solid form. Here, though, it is an adjective and can mean lofty, grand, or exalted in thought, expression, or manner. It can also mean of outstanding spiritual, intellectual, or moral worth. Yet it can mean too, tending to inspire awe usually because of elevated quality (as of beauty, nobility, or grandeur) or transcendent excellence. Since this is a bible passage there are some older meanings as well, high in place or complete and utter; like sublime ignorance. I took these definitions from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

So what did Sirach mean? What, or who, is the most sublime? Could it be God? Yes and no. We are to seek God always. God is so far beyond as our infinite, eternal and unconditional lover.

Yet, at the same time, God is also part of us; Jesus is one just like us in all things but sin. The Holy Spirit indwells in us. Has Sirach told us not to seek that which challenges us to new ways of thinking or better ways of knowing God's creation? No, because God would not have given us inquiring minds. Or could it be seeking to know the mind of God? When we ask the question why do things happen or, for that matter, why not, who are we asking? We ask God for God is the only one who truly knows. From God, we rarely get a good answer.

When we reach the ends of our strength, on whom can we rely to take one step further? It is God, whom we constantly seek. God has all the strength there is and since we're all here together today, God is happy to share it. We seek God for meaning when we face our moments of weakness, pain and sin. God is able to work in unexpected ways too. God works through people like you and me to help us cope with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. We may not be able to seek and know God's mind but we can seek and know God's heart. In Jesus, one like us, God knows all we go through from our human perspective.

This is the origin of our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. How can we hear the voice of God? What did God speak? The Word that is Jesus who reveals to us God's full love. All we have to do is to ask God for help and in God's own way we will know it when we listen for it. We can hear God's voice in scripture and through the voices of those around us. All of creation can speak for God has created all things. Our very experience can speak God to us. All we need do is be attentive and listen. God is just a thought away and nearer to us than our breath.

Hebrews has given a similar message. Our journey to God does not entail powerful and difficult manifestations and to look for them is a waste of time for they are few and far between. It is better and more fulfilling to journey to God day by day and experience God in our day to day lives. For then we can seek God in all our experiences and relationships. In that way God surprises us with God's presence.

As we gather together for mass, we will experience Jesus in our midst as he promised. The author of Hebrews has described two experiences of gathering as an assembly. He described the mass we now share and gathering with the Risen Christ when Jesus returns in the Kingdom of God. One we experience now and the other for which we now hope. All this is possible because of Jesus death and resurrection. His sacrifice has made us beloved of himself and God. We approach God as we approach one another. Mount Zion is the hill upon which was built Jerusalem and God's temple and is symbolic of God's true dwelling; within and among God's people and indwelling in each of us.

Jesus, in the gospel, has described his personal public etiquette for his public feasting. This is some good advice. Since Jesus was a first century Palestinian Jewish man he was very aware of public shame and public honor. Honor was the natural state of people. Shame was a state that the individual person brought about by ineptness and pride. However, does this still apply to us? Who is most important as we gather for mass? Some may say that it is me; for there can be no mass without a priest. But what most of us don't know, there must be at least a congregation of one to celebrate mass with me. A congregation's presence at mass is as

important a presence as is mine. As Jesus said, “When two or three gather in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:19–20)

The fullness of Christ’s priesthood must be present with him for the Eucharist; Jesus, his ordained priesthood and his priesthood of the baptized. It’s easy for us to miss this reality with me or another priest as the center of your attention. But who is my center of attention as I celebrate mass? It is you in the congregation. As we gather we become the church, the mystical body of Christ. At mass we receive communion as the outward sign of our identity as Christ’s Church gathered as one.

I also like to see the babies in our midst that may cry out or scream as being essential to worship as well. They all know, even as infants, that being at church is a special place and when they cry out they are the only ones unafraid and pray to God with full voice. Listen closely, for when they scream, often they are on key. They’re also the only ones who will sing with a full voice. They are important to worship with us for as baptized members of the church, as with us, they are our present and not our future.

With our presence at mass, there is no one who is most important other than Jesus and in him we are his beloved brothers and sisters. Through him we are all God’s beloved sons and daughters. In Jesus we become one. This is an important insight to us as we form our new parish. It is not our location but those with whom we gather that builds the Church. The Church comes first and through Christ’s Church we can become a parish. Gathering in Jesus’ name builds community and the community builds, in Christ, our new parish.

This gospel is in two parts. The first is about relationships with in the community. The second is about the community’s mission. For as a Church, who do we serve? Jesus and each other for sure. But as a Church, we also have a relationship with the wider world and with other people who may or may not be members. We have social responsibility too. God’s justice always forgives us when we sin. God forgives us as God shares compassion for us. We can then share compassion with the poor, homeless, disabled, displaced and disenfranchised. Jesus used a banquet or a luncheon as the means to do this. But does this one passage limit us? We can look beyond Jesus’ words and parables to seek people’s needs today, in our context. Jesus’ words challenge us to respond to his mandate. How can we, as individuals and a community, address the need for social justice and compassion for our brothers and sisters in Christ? Are we open for a wider discussion and dialog?

May our fellowship in Christ inspire us to seek him in all we may meet.

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