

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle 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 27:4-7

In the Greek version of the Bible, the first title of this book was “The Wisdom of Ben Sirach,” but from the time of Saint Cyprian, early in the third century, the Latin title *Ecclesiasticus*, meaning “church book”, was used. It received this title 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 named in 50:27 as “Jesus, son of Eleazar, son of Sirach” (in Hebrew: *Yeshua Ben Eleazar Ben Sira*).

Sirach was originally written in Hebrew, as the Greek translator (the grandson of the original author) says in the prologue. (Sirach is the only book in the Bible which contains a translator’s prologue which, while not inspired writing, is always included.) Saint Jerome was acquainted with the Hebrew text, which was used up to the Middle Ages. In the 11th century the Hebrew disappeared and could not be used again until about 2/3^{rds} of it was discovered in an old synagogue in Cairo in 1896.

According to the prologue and other passages in the book, the inspired author was a learned scribe, a humble and zealous man, who lived in Jerusalem. From an early age he had meditated deeply on sacred Scripture. As an adult he was an energetic traveler and always kept his eyes and his soul open to test “the good and evil among men.” He eventually settled in Jerusalem, where he opened a school to give moral and civic education to all comers; there, under the inspiration of God, he wrote this book. His grandson – the Greek translator – arrived in Egypt in 133 B.C. He began his translation in 132 B.C., working from the Hebrew text, which was probably written prior to 170 B.C.

As happened with all the wisdom books of the Bible, the Greek translator puts special emphasis on the practical purpose of Sirach. Firstly, he advises everyone to live in accordance with divine Law, which should be the highest rule and main aspiration of man’s behavior. But as he says in the prologue, Ben Sirach wanted to write this book for those living abroad “who wished to gain learning, being prepared in character to live according to the law.”

This book played an important part in shaping the faith of the Jewish people; to equip them to cope with the imminent menace of Hellenism, which ran completely counter to the monotheism of the people of the Old Covenant.

When the Hebrew canon of scripture was formed (around A.D. 90), Sirach was omitted. We must recall that it appears that the criteria for inclusion in the canon were:

- 1) Must have been originally written in Hebrew
- 2) Must have been written prior to 400 B.C.
- 3) Must be of good moral character

This book fails the second criterion. Because it was not included in the Hebrew canon, the Protestant Bible does not contain the book of Sirach.

4 When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do a man's faults when he speaks.

The sacred author is using agricultural imagery. The Greek word translated here as "husks" is literally "refuse." After grain is threshed, it is placed in a sieve. The refuse, including straw, husks and dung, remains behind.

5 As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace,

If the clay isn't completely dry, the piece explodes in the kiln (furnace).

so in his conversation is the test of a man. 6 The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had;

As an example, sycamore fruit had to be punctured to grow fat and juicy; this was the job of the "dresser of sycamores."

so too does a man's speech disclose the bent of his mind. 7 Praise no man before he speaks, for it is then that men are tested.

Speech is the principal criterion for evaluating a person.

2nd Reading - 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

For the past two weeks we have heard Saint Paul talk of the reality of the resurrection for all of us; as demonstrated by our older brother, Jesus. Today we hear Paul end his discussion of the resurrection of the dead with a hymn of triumph over death. This will also end our study of 1st Corinthians for this cycle, except for one hearing on Pentecost Sunday.

54 And when this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality, then the word that is written shall come about:

When the bodies of the elect, by resurrection or change, become incorruptible or immortal,

the last enemy, death, will have been vanquished and Scripture fulfilled.

“Death is swallowed up in victory.⁵⁵ Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

Saint Paul combines two Old Testament texts: Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14.

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin,

The sting of a serpent. Death, like a serpent deprived of its venomous sting, can no longer harm those who are in Christ (Genesis 3:15). Death entered the world through sin (Romans 5:12).

and the power of sin is the law.

Saint Paul suggests that the law gave sin its power by giving a knowledge of God's commandments and threatening death to a sinner, without giving the poor man the strength to keep them (Romans 7:7-25). Sin, death, and law have played no role in Paul's theology up to this point, but they are key concepts in Romans, especially chapters 5 through 7.

“Without the law sin was weak. It existed, to be sure, but it did not have the power to condemn, because although evil occurred, it was not clearly pointed out. Thus it was no small change which the law brought about. First, it caused us to know sin better, and then it increased the punishment. But if the effect of the law was to increase sin when it meant to check it, that is not the fault of the law but of the way which it was abused.” [Saint John Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 392), *Homilies on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 42,4]

⁵⁷ But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The new covenant replaces the old. Sin can now be forgiven and forgotten.

“Christ did not win the victory for himself but for our benefit. For when He became a man, He remained God, and by overcoming the devil, he who never sinned gained the victory for us, who were bound in death because of sin. The death of Christ defeated the devil, who was forced to surrender all those who had died because of sin.” [The Ambrosiaster (between A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles*]

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

The hard work of the Christian life is not in vain, because the Christian is “in the Lord” who has already won the victory.

Gospel - Luke 6:39:45

Today we complete a teaching which was begun two weeks ago – the sermon on the plain. We began with the beatitudes and curses, and last week we heard that we are to love our enemies. This week we hear Jesus' teaching on uprightness of heart.

³⁹ [Jesus told his disciples] a parable,

Parables are wise sayings or fictitious short stories. The parables are a development of a literary form which has its roots in Old Testament and rabbinic literature.

Nine Old Testament parables:

- 1) The ewe lamb (2 Samuel 12:1-14)
- 2) Two brothers and the avenger (2 Samuel 14:1-11)
- 3) The escaped captive (2 Kings 20:35-40)
- 4) The vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7)
- 5) The eagle and the vine (Ezekiel 17:3-10)
- 6) The lion whelps (Ezekiel 19:2-9)
- 7) The vine (Ezekiel 19:10-14)
- 8) The forest fire (Ezekiel 21:1-5)
- 9) The boiling pot (Ezekiel 24:3-5)

The purpose of the parable is to bring the listener to concede a point which he does not perceive as applicable to himself. In addition the parable whets the curiosity and attracts attention; the listener is trapped because of his desire to hear how the story comes out.

“Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?”

In Matthew these words are addressed to “scribes and Pharisees”: (Matthew 15:14) but Luke addresses not false teachers but the disciples; who are blind until they have their eyes opened by Jesus' teaching (the sermon on the plain which we have heard for the past two weeks). Once they have learned to apply the teaching, they will be able to teach others.

⁴⁰ No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?

This is an admonition to those who see their lapses as being minute in comparison to the gross failures of others. This is obviously hyperbole (an exaggeration used as a figure of speech “this book weighs a ton”), but it gets the point across.

⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,’ when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite!

The word hypocrite originally meant actor. Here, the meaning is a person pitifully deceived

by their own condition. They are called to exercise self-criticism.

Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye. ⁴³ **"A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit.**

Matthew addresses these words to false prophets (Matthew 7:16-21); here, Luke gives a much more universal application. To distinguish the good tree from the bad tree we need to look at the fruit the tree produces (deeds) and not at its foliage (words). There is no lack of people here on earth who, on being approached, turn out to be nothing but large, shiny, glossy leaves. Meanwhile, many souls are looking at us hoping to satisfy their hunger, which is a hunger for God. We must not forget that we have all the resources we need.

⁴⁴ For every tree is known by its own fruit. For people do not pick figs from thornbushes, nor do they gather grapes from brambles. ⁴⁵ A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.

Effective compliance with the teaching of the sermon on the plain can come only from a heart that has been converted to the gracious God proclaimed in Jesus' kingdom ministry (read [James3:1-18](#)).