

FIRST READING: Sirach 35:1-12

A reading from the Book of Sirach:

To keep the law is a great oblation, and he who observes the commandments sacrifices a peace offering. In works of charity one offers fine flour, and when he gives alms he presents his sacrifice of praise. To refrain from evil pleases the LORD, and to avoid injustice is an atonement. Appear not before the LORD empty-handed, for all that you offer is in fulfillment of the precepts. The just one's offering enriches the altar and rises as a sweet odor before the Most High. The just one's sacrifice is most pleasing, nor will it ever be forgotten. In a generous spirit pay homage to the LORD, be not sparing of freewill gifts. With each contribution show a cheerful countenance, and pay your tithes in a spirit of joy. Give to the Most High as he has given to you, generously, according to your means. For the LORD is one who always repays, and he will give back to you sevenfold. But offer no bribes, these he does not accept! Trust not in sacrifice of the fruits of extortion. For he is a God of justice, who knows no favorites.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 50:5-6, 7-8, 14 and 23

To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

"Gather my faithful ones before me, those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." And the heavens proclaim his justice; for God himself is the judge.

To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

"Hear, my people, and I will speak; Israel, I will testify against you; God, your God, am I. Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you, for your burnt offerings are before me always.

To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

"Offer to God praise as your sacrifice and fulfill your vows to the Most High. He that offers praise as a sacrifice glorifies me; and to him that goes the right way I will show the salvation of God."

To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

Gospel: Mark 10:28-31

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark:

Peter began to say to Jesus, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come. But many that are first will be last, and the last will be first."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 8th Tuesday of the Year

Last Sunday was Pentecost and marked the end of Eastertide. Pentecost also marked the resumption of Ordinary Time. I have always disliked the title Ordinary. I have always preferred to call it the Season of the Year. Each day is special and unique. As we move forward in time, once the day ends a new and unique one begins. I like thinking of the day's uniqueness, not its ordinariness.

Today our first reading is from the book of Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus). The book consists of a collection of wise and ethical sayings of one Jesus Ben Sirach. It is the only book of the Old Testament to be signed by its author. There is also an introduction, before the body of text begins, by the scribe who translated the collection from Hebrew into Greek. The scribe was Jesus Ben Sirach's grandson. Sirach was not a prophet but a spiritual elder, one who helped to shape the faith-lives of his followers. Through his book he has passed his wisdom and vision to us.

Since the mass prayers have been re-translated word for word from Latin to English, one word, oblation has returned to a more common usage. What is it? It is an offering made specifically to God. Often it connotes a ritual offering to God. At mass bread and wine are presented as gifts to God in the preparation and presentation of the gifts. They are offered for the purpose of becoming the actual offering to God. After the consecration they become the body and blood of Jesus and only look and taste like bread and wine. We call the transformation into the Eucharist transubstantiation. We offer Jesus to God.

For Sirach, the offering to God or oblation is the person who has a living faith and thereby gives witness to that faith. Following God's commandments is doing what God wants and shows others what having faith can do in a person's life. When we pray the Our Father, as Jesus taught us, we pray that we may do much the same. We seek to do God's will, seek God's Kingdom and forgive each other. We also pray that we may know God as we break and share our daily bread. It's important to remember that this is not, at its heart a Christian book. It represents concepts, practices and beliefs from Judaism. We interpret this book from a Christian perspective.

The Just One and God's Justice do not mean exactly the same things to us as they meant to contemporary readers. For us the Just One can only be God, for we are all sinners who need God's grace and forgiveness. We can call ourselves justified by God's grace and forgiven through God's love and Jesus' death on the cross. For contemporary Jews following God's law made one Just. The Just One could be any person faithful to God by following God's law.

Getting back to the offerings we make at mass, the offering we give to God is the same gift that God gave to us. Jesus offered himself on the cross as a sacrifice to God. The only offering that could truly forgive our sin and win for us the promise of eternal life was the life of God. In offering his life to God, Jesus gave his life to us. The Paschal Event was once and for all. God became human, suffered and died on the cross, rose from the dead, returned to the father and sent the Holy Spirit but once. When we gather for mass, we never re-live those events, but remember them.

At the Jewish Seder Meal during Passover, those who attend and partake in the meal do so as if the events of Exodus were happening to them now. This is how we remember at mass. It is as if

we witnessed Jesus birth, death, resurrection, ascension and coming of the Spirit. I like to use the word to celebrate for this experience. We celebrate our birthdays without ever remembering our births. Our mothers do or did. We celebrate our parents' birthdays when we were not even a glimmer in their eyes. We remember those events as if we were there.

Sirach's message is basically simple. Do good to show God's goodness. Be generous because God has given us many gifts; we are alive and kicking today. Be honest with God because God forgives out of an infinite, eternal and unconditional love. As Sirach had a million wise sayings, so do we who are faithful to God like he was.

The gospel, today, is about humility. Humility is usually misunderstood. We have a tendency to mistake humiliation for humility. I will take the last place so God will bring me to the front of the line. I will show myself to be a loser so that God can make me a winner. I will give up all I have to get myself more in heaven. Key to understand today's gospel can be with the words, "for my sake and the sake of the Kingdom." In them we can know God's presence. We remember from whom we and all things come. God is the source and God is love.

Humility is an honest appraisal of who we really are in the eyes of God. God is able to see through all our scams, shams and ploys. God knows our goodness and our weakness. God knows all our sins and where all our skeletons are buried. There is no hiding from how well God knows us. Sometimes we think that we can "win" God's favor. I can always do something more and gain a higher place in heaven. The problem with that thinking is simple. Salvation can only come as a gift from God. We don't earn it or deserve it. Through Jesus, God has saved and forgiven us by a gift given in love, love for the world, humanity and you and me, sinners all. God makes us worthy, as we pray just before we receive communion.

One can read this gospel as if we are bargaining with God. If I give away all I have, love, need and make, God will love me more. God loves us because God made us. God showed this love through Jesus' death on the cross. This passage actually challenges us to recognize the presence of God in all those things and people. They are God's gifts to us. All things and people, all creation comes from God and belongs to God. In all the things we do, in all the experiences we have and in all our relationships, we can discover God's loving presence. God acts to be close to us. All our sacrifices and prayers and all the things we can release to God do just the opposite of what we expect. God already has all things. We can sacrifice because God gave us the grace to do so. Through our actions to let go, we find ourselves more closely in God's loving arms. Since we believe in God and in God's son, Jesus, we have God's gift of faith and that is all we need for God's gifts of salvation, forgiveness and eternal life.

May our prayer remain, "Lord I know you are near."

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