



EXEGESIS

1st Reading, Sir 27:30-28:9

1. Jesus ben Sirach wrote down his reflections on the Torah to help others on their spiritual journey. This we know from the foreword written by a grandson who translated the Hebrew original in the late second century before Christ. Sirach valued the Law of Moses as the source of true wisdom. His insights in this reading could reflect accounts in the Torah—such as Cain and Abel (Gn 4), or the sale of Joseph, son of Jacob (Gn 37).
2. Our ways. Sirach describes anger and wrath as “hateful things,” thereby leading readers to see the contradiction in allowing such emotions to rule over them. People “hug them tight” seeking comfort in emotions so opposite from love and friendship. Sirach reminds readers to be mindful of the transitory nature of life which offers a sobering perspective. People look for mercy and healing from God, yet are unwilling to extend the same to others in this world.
3. God’s ways. God is merciful and full of compassion. Sirach wants his readers to remember that they are bound to the Lord through the covenant. This should give them every motivation to be like God by extending mercy and compassion to others. Such were the ideals God looked for in the people of Israel when God chose to go in their company through the Ark of the Covenant. In Leviticus 19:18, God even challenged them to “love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” Sirach leads readers to ponder things anew by expressing this same command negatively, “Hate not your neighbor.” The wording here recalls the “hateful things” Sirach warned readers to avoid in the opening line of the reading.

2nd reading, Rom 14:7-9

1. *Our life.*
Paul encourages us to take an honest look at life. We live and we die for the Lord. We should never imagine that we are the ones in charge.
2. *The Lord.*



Jesus Christ won the victory over death. He is, therefore, the lord of the dead and of the living.

Gospel, Mt 18:21-35

Today's Gospel focuses on mercy and forgiveness. An encounter between Jesus and Peter leads to a parable which illustrates Jesus' teaching.

1. The rabbis

The rabbis had a general rule of thumb that indicated a sinner could be forgiven as many as three times. This would have been considered very generous and merciful. No doubt, Peter felt that he was raising the bar substantially by suggesting to Jesus that a community member who sins against another should be forgiven as many as seven times. This is double the generosity suggested by the rabbis. How shocked Peter was to hear Jesus correct the number of times a sinner must be forgiven to 77 times (which can also be translated "70 times seven times"). This is a symbolic way of saying that a sinner must be forgiven an indefinite number of times. This teaching of Jesus is illustrated by a parable about forgiveness.

2. The King

The first part of the parable focuses on a king and his servant who owed the king an amount that he could never repay. At first the king responded in a traditional business manner by selling the slave, his wife, his children, and all his property in payment for the debt. But the servant pleads with the king and promises to pay back the full amount. In a surprising move, the king has compassion on the servant and forgives the entire amount and lets him and his family go. The king has acted in an honorable manner forgiving his servant.

3. The Servant

Ironically, that same servant experienced the very same situation with one of his fellow servants, except the amount of the debt was much smaller. Based on the first servant's experience with the king, we would expect him to act in a similar manner toward his fellow servant. He does just the opposite and has his fellow servant thrown into prison. There is justice, however, when the king finds out what happened. In response, the "wicked servant" is handed over to torturers and loses everything. The point is that God places no limits on forgiveness, thus humans should do likewise. Forgiveness must be unending and from the heart. If humans place limits on forgiveness, limits will be placed on them.



HOMILY CONNECTIONS

LENS: The experience of family is the first and the most important influence of our faith, our values, and our view of the world. Our experiences, lived within families form the lens through which we see, and interact with the world.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society – in economics, politics, in law and policy – directly affects human dignity and the capacity for the individual to grow in community. Marriage and family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened. The Church teaches that people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

“Another task for the family is to form persons in love and also to practice love in all its relationships, so that it does not live closed in on itself, but remains open to community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others, as well as by a consciousness of responsibility towards the whole of society” *St John Paul II, The Family in the Modern World no.64.*

“Local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instill a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land...Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds.” *Pope Francis, On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si), nos. 179, 219.*

SUMMARY: All the readings you hear this weekend are focused on mercy and forgiveness. The book of Sirach, the Letter to the Romans, and the Gospel of Matthew have similar messages: free yourself from hateful things and begin to live in the light of God’s grace.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: Modern technology is a wonderful thing. We are able to communicate instantly with someone on the other side of the globe. It even allowed us to participate virtually in the Mass during the coronavirus restrictions. We can travel faster, can explore the cosmos or the deepest recesses of the seas. Anything seems possible. And still the age-old problems of

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humanity remain-hatreds, grudges, vengeance and wars to name a few-just as they did in the ancient times of the Old and New Testaments. These age old problems affect us personally and also also affect our families. We do, however, have the power to change.

B) APPLICATION: Very often, when I hear or read Scriptures, I imagine my ancient biblical grandparents sending me advice from the depths of time. The advice given is always sound, but it not always easy to follow. It is always a challenge, but it is a challenge worth accepting. No matter how often I fail, I keep trying.

1) Hatreds and grudges are easy to hold on to.) Hatreds and grudges, especially those experienced in family life, are easy to hold on to. They are difficult to let go of, especially long festering ones. It often seems impossible to be rid of these "hateful things," and they slowly eat away at us.

a) We are called every week in our liturgies to "live in the light." Hateful things keep us in perpetual darkness.

b) The words we pray and the liturgical Mass are very familiar. We respond to the prayers and take part easily. Are these beautiful prayers and actions forgotten when we exit the doors of the church? So often the most familiar, precious things become mundane and are easily forgotten. The transforming power of Eucharist can free us of burdensome feelings if we allow that to happen.

2) Paul was torn between a desire to continue living in service to others or to be eternally united with God.

a) While we have no reason to fear death, our lives are of great value.

b) Despite the knowledge that we will live forever with God, we are called to live lives of witness and service.

c) We remain alive because of God's plans for us and God's ability to use us in service to the Gospel and the kingdom.

3) Jesus taught a lesson about God's generosity through one of his parables.

a) Jesus tells the story of a man who owned a vineyard as a metaphor for the way we can expect God to treat people.

b) The vineyard owner called on people at various times and wherever they happened to be.

c) At the end of the day, the landowner paid all the workers the same amount, no matter what time they began working.



d) Those who worked all day had a hard time understanding the landowner's action and were quite vocal about what they considered unfair treatment.

e) Jesus used the story to demonstrate God's generosity in rewarding all people in the same way

4) We can never fully understand the love and generosity of God, but we are called to imitate our creator in our interactions with our families, and others by modeling the generosity, forgiveness and love that we see in our God.

a) God's love for us is unconditional.

b) God's unconditional love is beyond our understanding. But a glimpse of that love witnessed to a certain extent, by observing or experiencing a parent's love for their child.

c) God transcends our concepts of reward and punishment and even what we call "justice."

d) While we all benefit from God's generosity and unconditional love, God calls on believers to treat their own family members and others the same way.

e) When we adopt such a "godly" attitude, especially in our family relationships and with others we come in contact with, we will transform this world into the kingdom that Jesus promised.

f) Transformed by this love and forgiveness, we're called to participate in the wider world to work for justice and peace, and so help to bring about the King

C) TRANSITION TO THE LITURGY OF EUCHARIST

Recognizing that God will never turn away anyone who comes to him, let us gather together around the table as one family united by God's love and generosity.

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