

The Repentant is Favored

I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Sir 35:12-14,20-22)

The God of justice

¹²Give to the Most High as he has given to you,/ generously, according to your means./ ¹³For he is a God who always repays/ and will give back to you sevenfold./^e ¹⁴But offer no bribes; these he does not accept!/
The Prayer of the Lowly

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²⁰Those who serve God to please him are accepted;/ their petition reaches the clouds./ ²¹The **prayer of the lowly** pierces the clouds;/ it does not rest till it reaches its goal;/ Nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds./ ²²Judges justly and affirms the right./ God indeed will not delay,/ and like a warrior, will not be still/ till he breaks the backs of the merciless.

THE FOCUS: Prayer of the Lowly

COMMENTARY

- The Book of Sirach is one of the Deuterocanonical books of the OT.
- The text is divided into two parts:
 - Part I. God of justice (vv.12-14).
 - Part II. The prayer of the lowly (vv.16-18)
- In v.12, the God of justice has no favorites.
- In v.13, if ever he has favorites, the weak and the oppressed.
- God's favorites are also the orphans and the widows (v.14).
- Vv. 20-22 tell something about the prayer of the lowly: is heard (by God), petition goes to heaven, pierces the clouds, does not rest, till it reaches its goal, and does not withdraw till God responds.

REFLECTIONS

Our God is a God of justice. He looks upon the needs of the poor and the oppressed. He has a special affection to the weak, the orphan and the widow. God hears or pays attention to their prayers and cries.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23)



THE LORD HEARS THE CRY OF THE POOR.

SECOND READING (2 Tim 4:6-8.16-18)

Paul's end

^{6*} For I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand. ^{7*} I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. ^{8*} From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance.

Paul's feeling of being abandoned

^{16m} At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them!

God's rescue

¹⁷ⁿ But the Lord stood by me and gave me **strength**, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ^{18o} The **Lord will rescue me** from every evil threat and **will bring me safe** to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE FOCUS: God's Help

COMMENTARY

- In v.6, Paul is resigned to die, is imprisoned.
- In v.7, Paul sees his death as the end of his competition or race. No more struggles, arguments, fatigue, etc.
- V.8 indicates the reward of Paul (crown of righteousness).
- There is also a reward for others who long for God’s appearance.
- In v.16, Paul feels abandoned during the trial. Nobody comes to his rescue or stands by him.
- He wishes those expected to stand by him would not be punished.
- In v.17, he acknowledges the presence of God.
- His presence is active, strengthens him.
- Even in the last moments of his life, Paul considers himself as an instrument of God’s word.
- V.18 indicates Paul’s different meaning of “rescue”. Here it means God saves him from what keeps him from going to heaven (not rescue from prison and death).

REFLECTIONS

Death is something we cannot avoid.

If we are Christ’s believers, it does not mean we do not die anymore, or we are spared from sufferings and abandonment.

Christians must have proper attitude toward their sufferings and death.

Like Paul, we have to consider death as the end of our race and struggles, if we are involved in God’s work.

We can do that if we have a deep prayer life.

God is always with his mission workers even in times of trial.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 18:9-14)

Introduction

⁹He then addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. ¹⁰“Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.

The Pharisee

¹¹The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulter-

ous—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.’

The Tax Collector

¹³But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’

Conclusion

¹⁴I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

THE FOCUS: Asking for Mercy

COMMENTARY

- The Gospel Reading is about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Publican).
- It is addressed to the righteous (Pharisees).
- The Pharisee is contrasted with the Tax Collector in the context of their prayerlife.
- Prayer life is determined where they are coming from though both are in the Temple in Jerusalem.
- V.11 describes how the Pharisee prays: takes up his position (to be recognized), despises others, enumerates his accomplishments.
- V.13 describes how the tax collector prays: stands off at a distance (*not desiring to be recognized*), does not raise his eyes (*feeling of unworthiness*), beats his breast (*sorry for having offended God*), asks for mercy and forgiveness, and recognizes himself a sinner.
- V.14 says God accepts the prayer of the tax collector and goes home justified (he pleased God); God rejects the prayer of the Pharisee.
- The lesson: we must be humble when approaching God.

REFLECTIONS

When praying, we must be humble.

We do not need to remind God of the sins of others and our accomplishments. That is boasting, exalting ourselves.

God prefers to listen to our humble prayers which admit our sinfulness. We are not like God who is holy. We are in need of his mercy.

God appreciates the prayer of the lowly ones.

God rejects the prayer of those who do not realize their faults and failures. It is not at all prayer.

God also rejects this kind of people, if they don’t change. God saves the humble and the lowly.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The First Reading teaches us that the prayer of the humble and the lowly are acceptable to God.

The Second Reading teaches us that in our desperate situation God is with us. We are not alone in our sufferings. Like St. Paul, we have to acknowledge his presence. This is prayer.

The Gospel Reading teaches us that we should be humble when we pray.

How to develop your homily/sharing

How do you approach God? Do you stand confident before God that you are doing right in terms of your relationship with him and with others?

What do you bring to him?

The right way to approach God in prayer is that of a lowly person and a repentant sinner.

You bring to him your nothingness, your poverty. You admit your filth before him.

You will go home justified (favored), with a good mark.

God hates people who come to him boasting of their accomplishments, which are actually legal requirements, usually done without one's heart.

God wants repentant sinners. He listens to their prayers.

He justifies them. He declares they have done the right thing.

The First Reading clearly assures that the prayer of the poor, the humble and the lowly reaches the ears of God.

God is attuned to their groaning, to their voices in prayer.

Their cries do not go to waste.

God answers them by giving justice, which people fail to give.

The Second Reading displays the courage of Paul in the face of death and abandonment of his friends. In his suffering and loneliness, he reveals his faith: God is with him.

You can feel God's presence only if you pray.

The Gospel Reading emphasizes humility in approaching God in prayer.

Going to God with head up too high, too proud of one's correctness and accomplishment does not

work.

If you have that kind of attitude, you are just wasting time. You do not gain favor from God.

We must learn again to begin with our humble beginnings.

We are but dust and ashes.

We have nothing to be proud of. We are but sinners.

God accepts this mindset expressed in humble prayer.

If we cannot be humble in our prayers, it is hard also to be humble in our dealings with others.

We cannot combine boastfulness (pride) and prayer.

In the eucharist, Jesus teaches us to be humble.

The eucharist is a sacrament of humility. Here Jesus comes down to us in the forms of lowly bread and wine.

In the eucharist, we accept that someone is better than us, that someone has performed better than us.

In the eucharist, Jesus comes to teach us again that life is a matter of humble self-giving to others.

We cannot participate well in the eucharist if we put ourselves higher than others.

Jesus assures us of our salvation if we are truly humble like him, available to give inspiration and life.

-Prepared by Fr. Cielo Almazan, OFM

III. OUR CONTEXT

1. Today is Prison Awareness Sunday.

2. Many prisoners have already shown remorse and repentance. Though some are even victims of injustice or the justice system which according to some, seems to favor the rich than the poor. Let us pray for the continuing conversion of our prisoners.

3. What occasions can make us blind to the plight of our neighbors and thus make us remain captive to our self-righteousness? **(HM)**.