

A reading from the book of Sirach.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The Lord is the judge,
and with him there is no partiality.
He will not show partiality to the poor
but he will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged.
The Lord will not ignore the supplication of the orphan,
or the widow when she pours out her complaint.
The person whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted,
and their prayer will reach to the clouds.
The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds,
and it will not rest until it reaches its goal;
it will not desist until the Most High responds
and does justice for the righteous,
and executes judgment,
indeed, the Lord will not delay.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the second letter of Saint Paul to Timothy.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Beloved:

I am already being poured out as a libation,
and the time of my departure has come.

I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith.

From now on
there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness,
which the Lord, the righteous judge,
will give me on that day,
and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

At my first defence no one came to my support,
but all deserted me.

May it not be counted against them!

But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength,
so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.

So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack
and save me for his heavenly kingdom.

To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say **SLOWLY**:



The **WORD** of the **LORD**.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – C 30

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus told this parable
to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous
and regarded others with contempt:
“Two men went up to the temple to pray,
one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus,
‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people:
thieves, rogues, adulterers,
or even like this tax collector.
I fast twice a week;
I give a tenth of all my income.’
But the tax collector, standing far off,
would not even look up to heaven,
but was beating his breast and saying,
‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’
I tell you,
this man went down to his home justified rather than the other;
for whoever exalts himself will be humbled,
but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

This reading from Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) was obviously chosen to go with the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, as the caption indicates.

During the heyday of Biblical Theology, the wisdom literature was somewhat under a cloud. This was because it seemed hard to fit it in with the salvation-historical perspective that Biblical Theology had recovered.

This wisdom literature appears to deal with general religious and ethical truths and problems, quite detached from the concrete heres and nows of salvation history.

Typical of this attitude is the legend that Professor C. Ernest Wright constantly told his classes at McCormick and Harvard that he could not defend the place of Proverbs in the canon!

Now, however, there has been a reaction. The wisdom literature has a place in the canon that is as central as that of the salvation-historical and apocalyptic writings.

And Jesus understood himself quite as much as the bearer of the heavenly wisdom (thus holding an implicit wisdom Christology, which came to flower in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel) as he understood himself as the eschatological prophet, the announcer and bringer of the kingdom of God.

He does deal in what we have recently somewhat despised as “general truths of religion and ethics,” and this passage from Sirach is a worthy accompaniment to the illustrative story of the gospel reading, which also deals with a “general truth of religion and ethics.”

Responsorial Psalm 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23

Very appropriately, this psalm is one of the wisdom psalms. Thus Peake's Commentary: “In [verses] 11-22 he [the psalmist] offers instruction very much in the style of the wisdom teachers, about the nature and rewards of the good life.”

Similarly, the Jerome Biblical Commentary states: “A wisdom psalm, though it is widely classified as a psalm of thanksgiving.”

The author of 1 Peter takes up this psalm as a commentary on the qualities of the good life as it should be lived by the newly baptized, thus giving his stamp to its Christian application.

Reading II: 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

This reading has no direct connection with the other readings of this day but is the conclusion of the reading in course of 2 Timothy. Like the reading for the twenty-eighth

Sunday of the year, it is part of the (possibly genuine) farewell letter of Paul to Timothy, into which the “Pastor” has inserted his Church order and defense against Gnosticism.

Paul has apparently been before the court once (the *prima actio*). It went favorably, but, as he poignantly laments, “All [that is, the Roman Christians] deserted me.” Yet Paul anticipated only death for himself. Nothing here about the hope of release that marked his former imprisonments.

Why did the Roman Christians desert Paul? The letter to the Romans suggests that they may not have been very keen on his version of the Gospel anyhow, and they would hardly want to expose themselves unnecessarily in Nero’s court.

Before very long a dire persecution was to break out over the whole community. (The present writer’s chronology would place Paul’s trial and execution about 60, and the Neronian persecution in which Peter fell in 64, though other chronologies are possible.)

Despite the gloomy prospects, however, Paul is full of ultimate confidence: “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.”

Gospel: Luke 18:9-14

This parable is of a type peculiar to Luke. There is no pictorial aspect that points to an eschatological interpretation, as in the normal parable. The story gives its example directly. The disciples are meant to pray, not like the Pharisee, but like the publican.

Other illustrative stories are those of the Good Samaritan, the rich fool, and Dives and Lazarus. They inculcate religious and moral examples of a timeless kind and have no direct relation to Jesus’ eschatological message.

If, however, we allow that Jesus understood himself to be not only the announcer of the inbreaking of God’s kingdom but also the embodiment and spokesman of the divine wisdom (see above), then such parables as these fall naturally into their place as part of his teaching.

The Pharisee was quite right in performing his religious and moral duties. He was not like other people—extortioners, unjust, adulterers. Clearly, Jesus’ hearers would say of the Pharisee that he was a righteous man.

The tax collector, on the other hand, had nothing to commend him. He was no better than the rest of his kind. There was no question but that he was the “bad guy.” Yet Jesus pronounced him to be the “good guy.”

How could Jesus give a verdict that to his hearers would be nothing less than “outrageous” (E. Linnemann)? He did not mean that the Pharisee was wrong in his deeds of morality and piety, or that the tax collector was right in being a swindler and extortioner.

What was wrong about the Pharisee was his approach to God: he prayed with himself; he set before God all his merits, compared himself with the publican, and said with Little Jack Horner, “What a good boy am I!”—thereby smashing his goodness with one blow. He came before God trusting in his own, really genuine righteousness.

The tax collector, on the other hand, knew that he was a bad lot. He would not lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and cried, “Kyrie, eleison!” He was accepted by God because he threw himself on God’s mercy.

Reginald H. Fuller