

***Homily for February 25<sup>th</sup> 2019***

Today we begin readings in the book of Sirach which was written in Hebrew by Ben Sira, a sage of Israel in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC. 50 years later it was translated into Greek by his grandson. During this fifty years there had been a violent persecution by the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanies in order to force the Jewish people to adopt Greek religion and culture. Those first reading this book realized how precarious and vulnerable Judaism was as they faced great opposition. All around were forces wanting to eradicate Judaism. Much like the boy in the Gospel reading evil forces wanted to bind and constrict God's first born son – a way Israel is described in the Old Testament. Like Jesus in addressing this boy with authority, Sirach – spoke with authority in a time of calculated evil so as to free God's people from the bondage of the dominant Greek culture.

At the heart of this book is the word Wisdom. Listen to these verses from our reading:

***All wisdom is from the Lord,<sup>1</sup>***

***Wisdom was created before all other things,<sup>2</sup>***

***The root of wisdom—to whom has it been revealed<sup>3</sup>***

Wisdom we are told originates with the Lord and it is the first born of all created things. Wisdom say Sirach is what we are to desire above everything else, and is lavished on those who, according to the last verse of our reading, “love the Lord”.

So what is wisdom? Pope Benedict XVI in his book *The Principles of Catholic Theology* gives this very helpful explanation:

***Wisdom is a sharing in God's ability to see and judge things as they really are. God reveals himself as God by his just judgments; as God, he sees things without disguise, as they really are, and deals with each according to his truth. Wisdom is a sharing in God's way of seeing reality.***

Sharing in God's way of seeing reality. Isn't that a helpful definition? Be we living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC there are always those forces that want to dictate a way of perceiving the world that is contrary to God's wisdom. In our day there is a radical individualism as expressed regarding all ethical and moral questions that define who we are without any

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Sir 1:1). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Sir 1:4). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Sir 1:6). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

reference to God. Hence gender, marriage and sanctity of life issues are defining contemporary life as did Greek culture in the time of Ben Sirach.

What are we to do in light of this? There is a need for much prayer and fasting as Jesus said at the end of today's Gospel. Prayer in the fullest sense of that word, as we thoughtfully read scripture, attend Mass and form our lives so that we share in God's way of seeing reality. Fasting has to do with food of course, but also with a kind of detachment from the dominant culture. We want to affirm that it is not the culture that will define us, but God, because we are discovering something else our Wisdom text declares:

*Wisdom was created before all other things,  
and prudent understanding from eternity<sup>4</sup>*

Prudence could be defined as practical moral wisdom", It is the virtue that disposes practical reason, the mind thinking about what should be done, "to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it. . . . With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases"<sup>5</sup>

It is this practical Wisdom that is expressed on the pages of Sirach that we will be reading between now and Ash Wednesday. May these texts help prepare us for Lent and deepen our commitment to sharing in God's way of seeing reality.

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<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Sir 1:4). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>5</sup> Kreeft, Peter. Catholic Christianity (pp. 191-192). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.