

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #150

READING I Sirach 35:12–14, 16–18

A reading from the Book of Sirach

The LORD is a God of justice,
who knows no favorites.
Though not **unduly partial** toward the weak,
yet he **hears the cry of the oppressed**.
The Lord is **not deaf** to the wail of the orphan,
nor to the widow when she **pours out her complaint**.
The one who serves God willingly is heard;
his **petition** reaches the heavens.
The **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,
judges justly and affirms the right,
and the Lord will not delay.

Sirach = SI-ruhk; SEER-ak

Begin with authority and sweep the assembly as you declare this consoling truth.

Contrast what God does and does not do!

Fix concrete images of "orphan" and "widow" in your mind so you are not speaking of abstractions but of real people.

In the following lines you are stating and restating a single idea—that earnest prayers accomplish their goal. Speak with conviction and with enough energy to persuade

The final line offers assurance that whenever it comes, God's mercy is never too late.

TO KEEP IN MIND

Always pause at the end of the reading, before you proclaim the closing dialogue ("The Word of the Lord" or "The Gospel of the Lord").

READING I According to Sirach, the Lord shows no partiality. Having asserted that God knows no favorites, Sirach goes on to describe the Lord's particular care for the weak, oppressed, orphaned, and widowed. Rather than being a manifestation of divine partiality, God's concern for those who cry out in their need shows God listening and acting as a just judge. God's justice means the Lord always acts to establish, maintain, and restore right relationships. In the Hellenistic milieu in which Sirach was written, the poor were commonly dismissed as unworthy and

often oppressed by the strong and wealthy. In fact, those described as oppressed or wronged are literally the recipients of injustice (*edikemenou*). As a just judge, the Lord will right the wrongs that are committed against them. The cries and wails of those in need reach to the heavens, and are not withdrawn until the Most High responds.

The Lord's counterpart in responding to the needs of the lowly and poor is the audience to whom Sirach writes, young students whom he instructs in wisdom. Rather than accepting a cultural prejudice against the poor, Sirach looks to the Jewish

tradition as a reliable guide. "Because of the precept, help the needy, and in their want, do not send them away empty-handed" (29:9). The Torah itself demands such attentiveness to the poor (e.g., Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 15:8). Just as the Lord listens to their outcries and acts in justice, so too ought those who are truly wise: "Give a hearing to the poor man . . . let not justice be repugnant to you" (4:8, 9).

READING II Throughout his letters, Paul describes himself in many

For meditation and context:

Beloved = bee-LUHV-uhd

Paul is preparing for death. "Libation" is wine poured out as a sacrificial offering. "Departure" is a euphemism for his death. His tone is confident and resigned.

Paul is keenly aware that he did all this only with Christ's help, so he speaks with gratitude.

Because he understands God's merciful love, he knows God will bless all those who remain faithful. Again, the timbre of the lines is gratitude.

Paul was wounded by this disloyalty, but his prayer for them is sincere.

This is why he can be generous and forgiving: Christ did not abandon him!

To the very end, Paul's trust will be unwavering.

Pause before the final line, then speak it as a prayer.

ways, frequently referring to himself as apostle, servant, and slave, and he uses numerous metaphors to describe his life and ministry. In today's reading, written from prison, he develops two fitting metaphors to describe his present experience: his life is poured out like a libation, and he is running a race like an athlete. These two images are particularly poignant at this point in Paul's life as he sees that the time of his departure (*analysis*) is at hand. Referring to his impending death, Paul uses a metaphor employed by Homer for loosing a ship from its moorings in preparation for

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23 (7a)

R. The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

The LORD confronts the evildoers,
to destroy remembrance of them from the earth.

When the just cry out, the LORD hears them,
and from all their distress he rescues them.

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.

The LORD redeems the lives of his servants;
no one incurs guilt who takes refuge in him.

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

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to Timothy

Beloved:

**I am already being poured out like a libation,
and the time of my departure is at hand.**

**I have competed well; I have finished the race;
I have kept the faith.**

**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.**

**At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf,
but everyone deserted me.**

May it not be held against them!

**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.

**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.

setting sail. Paul's imprisonment is the final preparation for his departure. He sees his life as a living sacrifice, poured out like the ritual sacrifices of blood. We can imagine the incarcerated Paul with time to reflect on his life, looking at it now as a race that is almost completed. He has been a committed athlete in this race, and will earn no temporary laurel crown, but an eternal crown of righteousness. He is not maudlin or self-pitying as he sees the end drawing near, but longs for the Lord's appearance.

In the second part of the reading, Paul looks back at his life from another perspec-

tive. Though Paul had hoped that many of his coworkers would defend him, no one appeared. Yet, even in their absence, Paul does not stand alone. The Lord stands by him, giving him strength for the sake of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles. Alluding again to his imminent departure, Paul confidently relies on the Lord who will bring him safely to his heavenly Kingdom.

GOSPEL

In Jesus' parables, he creates characters familiar to his audience, but developed in stories that turn around commonly held beliefs or