

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH

LECTIONARY #17

READING I Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14

A reading from the Book of Sirach

God sets a **father** in honor over his **children**,
 a **mother's authority** he **confirms** over her sons.
 Whoever **honors** his **father atones** for **sins**,
 and preserves himself from them.
 When he prays, he is heard;
 he stores up riches who **reveres** his **mother**.
 Whoever honors his father is **gladdened** by children,
 and, when **he prays**, is **heard**.
 Whoever **reveres** his father will **live** a long **life**,
 he who obeys his father brings comfort to his **mother**.

My son, take **care** of your **father** when he is old;
grieve him not as **long** as he **lives**.
 Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him;
 revile him not all the **days** of his life;
 kindness to a father will **not** be **forgotten**,
firmly planted against the debt of your sins
 —a house **raised** in justice to **you**.

Sirach = SEER-ak

Slowly articulate your words in a gentle tone.

Imagine you are speaking to a child. Be kind in explaining how you would like to be treated as a parent.

Pause before you say this last line. Keep up the energy. Be firm.

READING I Jesus Ben Sira was a Jewish wisdom teacher writing around 200 bc who provided instruction on how to live wisely in society. His advice includes an array of topics ranging from how to use money, to the evils of gossip, to how to deal with fools. Underlying such seemingly mundane advice is Sirach's overarching theme: fear of the Lord. While the phrase often conjures up the notion of cringing dread, Sirach explains that fear of the Lord means love, hope, trust, and humility before God, keeping God's law, and seeking to please the Lord who acts

with mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. Today's reading expresses how the honoring of one's father and mother is a living, observable example of fear of the Lord.

The first word today, "God," places everything that Sirach says about family relationships in the context of God's power and purpose. Sirach teaches how to live in fear of the Lord within family life. Most of his instruction is about the honor due to the father, a perspective consistent with the patriarchal society of the era. Along with the honor due to the father, Sirach states clearly that the mother has God-

given authority over her sons (and daughters). Today, we aptly apply the instruction about honor to the father equally to both father and mother.

The honor due to parents, like fear of the Lord, implies respect and obedience. Particularly when parents are old and unable to care for themselves, children honor them by kindness, attentiveness, and understanding. In contrast, grieving a father or mother in their older years may be from neglect or even from insulting them in their frailty. The Lord, who is also a father (23:1), will remember how children treat

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5 (1)

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!

For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;
blessed shall you be, and favored.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
in the recesses of your home;
your children like olive plants
around your table.

Behold, thus is the man blessed
who fears the LORD.

The LORD bless you from Zion:
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

READING II Colossians 3:12-21

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians

[Brothers and sisters:

Put **on**, as **God's chosen** ones, holy and beloved,
heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness,
and patience,

bearing with one another and forgiving one another,
if one has a grievance against another;

as the Lord has forgiven **you**, so must you **also** do.

And over **all** these put on love,
that is, the **bond of perfection**.

And let the peace of Christ **control** your **hearts**,
the **peace** into which **you** were **also** called in **one** body.

And be thankful.

Let the word of **Christ dwell** in you **richly**,
as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another,
singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs
with gratitude in your hearts to **God**.

And **whatever** you do, in word or in deed,
do everything in the **name** of the **Lord Jesus**,
giving thanks to **God** the Father through him.]

A call to action. Pause before you begin.
Take your time as you proclaim these
wonderful words: compassion, kindness,
humility.

Let the congregation hear love and
thankfulness in your voice. Smile.

their parents. Throughout his wisdom teaching, Sirach shows that genuine fear of the Lord must include right relationships in day-to-day living.

For their part, children benefit by honoring their parents. Sirach writes extensively about the results of fulfilling the commandment of honoring father and mother: atonement for sins; prayers that are heard; lives gladdened by children; length of life; the canceling of debt for sin. The blessing given by honoring parents results in blessing received from God.

READING II Paul addresses his letter to the Colossians to "the holy ones and faithful brethren in Christ in Colossae" (1:2). In today's reading, he expands on this initial identity. They are "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved." In both verses, Paul regards the Colossians as "holy," his most common designation for the family of believers (e.g., Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2). Their holiness signifies being set apart by God's call, establishing them as God's own people. Being chosen and beloved further express the commu-

nity as belonging to God, having been immersed into Christ at Baptism.

Paul then explains to the whole community the lived implications of being chosen, holy, and beloved. As God has poured out love on them, they must pour out love in their own relationships. And as Christ was compassionate, kind, humble, and gentle, so too must be those who live in him. Because they are clothed in Christ, both their inner dispositions and outward actions should express their unity and transformation, for they have been formed into a single body.

Pause. Transition to a different tone as you address wives, husbands, children, and fathers.

Wives, be subordinate to your **husbands**,
as is proper in the **Lord**.
Husbands, love your wives,
and **avoid** any bitterness toward them.
Children, obey your parents in **everything**,
for this is **pleasing** to the **Lord**.
Fathers, do **not** provoke your children,
so they may **not** become discouraged.

[Shorter: Colossians 3:12–17]

GOSPEL Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

When the magi had departed, behold,
the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a **dream** and said,
“Rise, take the child and his mother, **flee** to **Egypt**,
and **stay** there until I **tell** you.

Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.”
Joseph **rose** and **took** the child and his mother by night
and **departed** for **Egypt**.

He stayed there until the **death** of Herod,
that what the **Lord** had said through the **prophet** might
be fulfilled,
*Out of **Egypt** I called my son.*

When Herod had died, behold,
the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream
to **Joseph** in **Egypt** and said,
“Rise, take the child and his mother and **go** to the land
of **Israel**,
for those who sought the child’s **life** are dead.”

Your tone is one of firmness. Pause before you proclaim the angel’s words.

As you lead the assembly through the journey, make sure you read with good eye contact and volume.

Herod = HAYR-uhd

Paul’s exhortation to them, “be thankful,” is the expected response of the community life in Christ. With the Word of Christ making a rich home in them, the family of believers ought together to offer prayers and sing hymns that overflow with gratitude.

After exhorting the whole community, Paul gives specific advice to husbands, wives, and children. While such household codes were common in the first-century milieu, Paul gives the code a baptismal interpretation. Having been plunged into Christ, each of them live in the Lord. Even

with the mutuality because of their common Baptism, Paul’s injunction to women to be subordinate to their husbands reflects the cultural expectation in a patriarchal society. Yet with this traditional view of the role of wives, Paul is more revolutionary in what he says about husbands. In the Greco-Roman world, husbands could exercise complete control over their wives, but because of their relationship in Christ, husbands are to show the same love already recommended to the whole community. The obedience expected of chil-

dren is accompanied by a loving tolerance of parents toward them.

GOSPEL Before the birth of Jesus, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. In today’s Gospel, Joseph receives two more revelatory dreams. The pattern of the two dreams today continues the pattern established in the first dream: the angel directs Joseph how to act, and Joseph responds obediently. Throughout Matthew’s opening chapters, Joseph is a righteous man who readily accepts the revelations that God gives him.