

## "FIRST IMPRESSIONS"

30<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY -C-

OCTOBER 26, 2025

Sirach 35: 12-14, 16-18; Psalm 34; 2 Timothy 4: 6-8. 16-18; Luke 18: 9-14

By: *Jude Siciliano*, OP



Dear Preachers:

Is Jesus being Sirach contradicting himself in today's first reading? The opening line reads, "The Lord is a God of justice, who knows no favorites, though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet God hears the cry of the oppressed." But the rest of the reading reveals a very partial God who has taken a very definite stand and turned a favoring ear toward "the oppressed...orphan...widow and the lowly." God does seem to have favorites, and they are not the ones our society calls "favored."

Sirach wrote in Hebrew around 180 BCE and fifty years later his work was translated into Greek for a dispersed Jewish community in a Hellenistic culture. He speaks to basic issues, particularly the inequalities in society. For those who see their comfort and riches as a blessing from God for their good deeds and social status, Sirach espouses another perspective. God has not favored the rich, no matter what visible signs they might point to of God's seeming approval.

If anything, God has chosen to take the side of the poor and to pay special attention to the prayer of the lowly—hence this reading's connection to today's gospel. Sirach suggests that if God is to be found standing with the poor and those treated unjustly, then we had better take more than a few steps in that direction ourselves. Justice requires that those who can, should help those who cannot.

Diane Bergant [with Richard Fragomeni, *Preaching the New Lectionary*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000.] points out the original Greek suggests that God not only hears the cry of the oppressed, God does more – God yields to their requests. "It's almost as if God is bound to respond positively to them. As a covenant partner God is accountable to them, especially when other covenant partners disregard their responsibilities" (page 397). The surprise in both this first reading and the gospel is that those considered unacceptable in social and religious circles are the very ones whose prayer is heard – their prayer is "proper."

Today's gospel teaches us a lot about prayer. First, prayer doesn't have to be long. Both men in the parable prayed very brief prayers. (I had a theology teacher once who said prayer can be very, very short----"Help!".) But each man's prayer was very different. In his brief prayer the Pharisee said "I" four times. While he seems to thank God for his goodness, he really is patting himself on the back. In his view he is singular and unique. He thanks God for his not being like "the rest of humanity, greedy, dishonest, adulterous – or even like this tax collector." In his own eyes he is a completed product. There is little room in him to be changed by his prayer. He

might have said prayers, but he didn't pray because he didn't see any need to change. There was no space for God to enter his life.

On the other hand, we don't hear the word "I" from the tax collector. He refers to himself by using "me"—"O God, be merciful to me a sinner." "I"—"Me" What's the difference? One ("I") is the subject of the sentence, the cause of the action. The other ("ME") is the object, the recipient of another's action. The tax collector can't achieve mercy on his own, he reveals his need and desire for God to do something for him. He wants to be changed, and he trusts that God will help him make the necessary change in his life. What must have shocked those who heard this parable is how radical it is. The Pharisee is not a bad person, he is doing everything he should have been doing, he is completely dedicated to living the law's demands. In fact, he goes beyond what was required in religious law. He is offering a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his personal exemplary behavior.

As someone working for the Roman occupation, the tax collector's life would have been considered an abomination, a betrayal to Israel and her God. But God sets this sinner right, does what the people thought observance of the law would do – God justifies the sinner. What got the tax collector right with God had nothing to do with strict observance of the law or a righteous public life. God accepted this sinner because he confessed his sin and hoped in God's mercy. When it comes right down to it, we are better off trusting in God's mercy than in our own efforts and what God might "owe" us in return.

Like the two men, we have come into this temple today to pray. Like the tax collector we recognize that we are not complete. We know we need to move over and leave room for God to continue shaping and molding us. What is in our hearts? Where do we need to make necessary changes in our lives? What are our desires and what are our limitations? We admit today that we are "works in progress," we admit our need for change and so we take prayerful positions before God. Unlike the Pharisee, we don't have to compare ourselves to others. We just have to be ourselves and be as honest with God as he was. God sees the empty spaces that need filling and the sins that need mercy. Who knows what work God be doing in us at this Eucharist today? Who knows what changes might come about when we put ourselves in God's hands today?

- We might find ourselves:
- withholding criticism
- giving one another the benefit of the doubt
- letting judgment pass into God's hands
- forgetting the past mistakes and offenses of others
- willing to be surprised by another's growth in goodness

In short, we might find ourselves letting go of our fixed notions and positions and giving another person space and time to grow. If God changes us in prayer today, we just might find ourselves enabling others to change. What good does prayer do? Does it change God, or does it change us? The gospel today says the tax collector went home "Justified" - changed. That means he was in right relationship with God. Something had changed in him through his prayer. If we are not changed by our prayers then perhaps we haven't acknowledged God as the subject

of our prayer and ourselves as the recipients of God's actions—the way the tax collector did. We may have said our prayers, but there is more to prayer than just words.

**Click here for a link to this Sunday's readings:**

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/102625.cfm>

## QUOTABLE

Wilfred Sheed is someone I have often quoted trying to come to grips with the challenge of good preaching. He does more than dismiss bad sermons (he does that, speaking in withering fashion of "cheery boy scouts"). He reminds one that the pain of life is the most constant, single factor, and says that a preacher not in touch with it recently has really nothing to say. He is right. So if life right now is full of roses, drop by the hospital soon, or read some reports from the war zones.

— Joseph T. Nolan in, *The World, The Church and Preaching: The Best of Good News Commentary*. New Berlin, Wisconsin: Liturgical Publications Inc, 1996.

## JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD



*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted*

—Psalm 34:19

When he was alive, Pope Francis frequently spoke profoundly to the pain and anguish that is prevalent among so many of God's children. To a group of poor people receiving assistance from local Catholic charities, he said, "Many of you have been stripped by this savage world, which doesn't provide work, which doesn't help, to which it makes no difference that children die of hunger."

The Pope mourned the African immigrants killed in the sinking of a boat near the southern Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, "It doesn't matter [to the world] that people must flee slavery and hunger in search of liberty." "With how much pain, so often, we see that they find death," he said. "This is a day of weeping. The spirit of the world does these things."

In one of his meetings with young patients at a hospital, many of whom were confined to wheelchairs and with the room resounding with their cries and moans, he reflected, "We are among the wounds of Jesus. Jesus is hidden in these kids, in these children, in these people. On the altar we adore the flesh of Jesus, in them we find the wounds of Jesus."

More recently, our new Pope Leo XIV reaffirms that "in our world bearing deep scars of conflict, inequality, environmental degradation, and a growing sense of spiritual disconnection," it is crucial for Christians to continue working and praying together. (2025 Ecumenical Week)

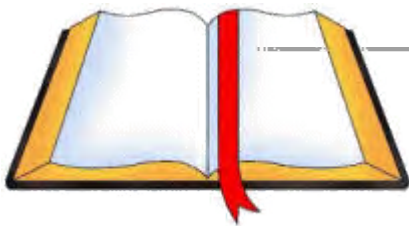
It is human to want to flee pain but as Christians, we must turn toward the pain of this world. Like firefighters that run toward a fire, we must do our part to stop the fire of suffering, for the love of Christ, for the love of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

The task is too big, you say. God is not asking you to conquer everything that is broken but to discover your own humanity in the face of so much suffering; to allow God to work through your efforts to make lives more whole. We have many caring ministries here at Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral that assist the brokenhearted and downtrodden. You have only to go to our website at [Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral](http://HolyNameofJesusCathedral) to find a social justice ministry that could use your talents. Then contact me at [socialconcern@hnojnc.org](mailto:socialconcern@hnojnc.org).

Be close to the brokenhearted and you will find yourself close to God.

*Barbara Molinari Quinby, MPS, Director  
Office of Human Life, Dignity, and Justice Ministries  
[Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral](http://HolyNameofJesusCathedral), Raleigh, NC*

## FAITH BOOK



*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run.*

*"Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.*

---

### From today's Gospel reading:

The 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, adulterous – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income."

### Reflection:

Some people think our prayer can change God's mind. Actually, true prayer will change us. But there was no chance that the Pharisee's prayer would have any transformative effect on him. He seems to think that his extra good life has earned him the reward of salvation. But, in the end, the tax collector is the one who is put right with God because he turned to God for mercy.

### So, we ask ourselves:

- When we pray, how much of our time is spent in saying "Thank you" to God?
- If, in our daily prayer we started by listing the things we were thankful for, what effect do you think that would have on our relationship with God? With others?
- When we pray, how much of our time is spent in saying "Thank you" to God?

- If, in our daily prayer we started by listing the things we were thankful for, what effect do you think that would have on our relationship with God? With others?

## POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

*"One has to strongly affirm that condemnation to the death penalty is an inhuman measure that humiliates personal dignity, in whatever form it is carried out."*

*---Pope Francis*

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.

### **Please write to:**

- Terry Robinson                      #0349019 (On death row since 4/10/2000)
- Mark Squires                        #0688223 (5/17/2000)
- Paul Brown #0051026    (8/11/2000)

**---Central Prison** P.O. 247 Phoenix, MD 2113

Please note: **Central Prison** is in Raleigh, NC., but for security purposes, mail to inmates is processed through a clearing house at the above address in Maryland.

For more information on the Catholic position on the death penalty go to the Catholic Mobilizing Network: <http://catholicsmobilizing.org/resources/cacp/>

## DONATIONS

"First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Dominican Friars. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, [CLICK HERE](#).

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to:  
Fr. *Jude Siciliano*, OP.

*St. Albert Priory*  
3150 Vince Hagan Drive  
Irving, Texas 75062-4736

Make checks payable to: Dominican Friars.

**Or** go to our webpage to make a secure, tax-deductible online donation:

<https://www.PreacherExchange.com/donations.htm>

## RESOURCES

### ***ORDERING OUR CD:***

We have compiled a new CD for sale:

- This CD contains 2,098 reflections with at least three "First Impressions" reflections for each Sunday in each of the three Liturgical years and broken into the categories: Advent, Christmas Season, Lent, Triduum, Easter, Ordinary Time, Solemnities and Feasts. Plus, important book reviews are also included. This newest Version, "9.2", still contains Fr. Jude's original WordPerfect Files, plus updated and edited Word & PDF files with the original WordPerfect dead links removed.

- If you are a preacher, lead a Lectionary-based scripture group, or are a member of a liturgical team, this CD will be helpful in your preparation process. Individual worshipers report they also use these reflections as they prepare for Sunday liturgy.

- You can order the CD by going to our webpage - [www.PreacherExchange.com](http://www.PreacherExchange.com) and clicking on the "*First Impressions*" CD link on the left.

### ***FREE EMAILS:***

We have two English email lists available:

#### 1. "[FIRST IMPRESSIONS](#)"

a. A preacher's early reflections on the upcoming Sunday's readings and liturgy, always at least one week ahead of the Liturgical Calendar. "A tool to help Preachers prepare for their next trip to the Ambo." Available in Spanish & English and authored by Fr. *Jude Siciliano*, OP.

b. [Click Here](#) to Sign Up.

#### 2. "[VOLUME II](#)"

⦿ These reflections follow the Liturgical Calendar and appear here about mid-week each week. They are written by various guest authors.

If you would like to submit a reflection of your own, then [Click Here](#) to send it as a "Request to Post" to the Webmaster. Deadline is Monday of each week for the upcoming Sunday.

### ***OUR WEBSITE:***

<https://www.PreacherExchange.com> - Where you will find Preachers Exchange, which includes "First Impressions," and "Volume 2" as well as articles, book reviews, daily homilies and other material pertinent to preaching and Scripture reflection.

***FOR INFORMATION OF "ANY KIND" OR TO MAKE A SUGGESTION:*** [Click Here](#)