

## Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

Psalm 68: 4-5, 6-7, 10-11

Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

### The Word In Liturgy

The Book of Sirach was written in Hebrew at the start of the second century B.C., at a time when the “wisdom” of Israel’s pagan neighbors was the envy of the entire world. The author is a sage, well traveled and well versed in the many cultures and philosophies of his day which might seem quite attractive to his Jewish countrymen. He writes his own book of reflections on the Torah, on the wisdom of the nations, and on God’s ways in the world, in order to convince his countrymen of the superiority of relying on the wisdom of Yahweh over any other source of guidance. In this section, the author offers fatherly advice regarding humility and warns against a prideful attitude (“Humble yourself the more, the greater you are”). The final verse contains a proverb about how concern for the poor can “atone for sin.” The text is thus linked to today’s gospel reading, not only by its teaching on self-effacing humility, but also by the example of care for the poor, which is commended by Jesus.

Sociological studies of ancient Judaism have recently deepened our understanding of Jesus’ social milieu in significant ways. Scholars have in particular highlighted the importance of dining protocols for establishing and maintaining social hierarchies. These studies offer helpful insights into why Luke so often describes the table fellowship of Jesus, taking pains to point out his custom of welcoming at table the poor and outcast. The jockeying for position at table that Jesus castigates in today’s reading would have been judged reprehensible by many of Jesus contemporaries. However, Jesus goes beyond a lesson in etiquette here when he suggests that welcoming the poor and outcast to table is linked to the final judgment. That



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apocalyptic reference puts the entire scene into the context of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God which, he has shown, is already a present reality in his person and in his mission to bring the Good News to those judged least deserving of it by his pious contemporaries. Throughout his ministry, Jesus shows a "preferential option" for the poor. Luke obviously felt that this example of Jesus was (or should be) normative for every Christian community.

## **Catholic Doctrine**

### ***Preferential Option for the Poor***

In our Catholic teaching, the purpose of society is to ensure a proper framework to promote the conditions for both associations and individuals to obtain what is their due, given their nature and vocation. Social justice relies, therefore, on the notion of the "common good," which is defined as the "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and easily." (GS, 26) Thus, the common good concerns all. And, that concern focuses on making accessible to each those basic things that provide a genuine human life: food, clothing, housing, health, work, education, culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, privacy, and so on. (CCC 1908)

It is within this context of the Catholic social teaching and our understanding of the common good, combined with the Church's reflection on the good news of Jesus Christ that a preferential option for the poor has been articulated. We believe that God blesses those who help the poor and that there is a definite gospel imperative for us to act for when the "poor have the good news preached to them" it is a sign of the presence of Christ (Mt 11:5; Lk 4:8). A love of the poor has been a constant hallmark of the Church's tradition.

While love for the poor is a Gospel hallmark and has been present in the tradition from the earliest times, the Church only relatively recently articulated this concern as expressed in the language of a "preferential option." This theme arose particularly in the Church of Latin America, as Catholics there grappled with massive injustices and oppressive social conditions. The situation gave rise to liberation theology. Since the early 1970s, this notion of a preferential option for the poor has found its way into the vocabulary of papal and curial writings.

Material deprivation, unjust oppression, physical and psychological illness and death—all the many forms of human misery—have elicited the compassion of Jesus and the concern of the Church. This concern of the Church for the poor is not only directed to helping each individual



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but also is directed to addressing the social causes of inequality, deprivation and misery. —

Special attention to the needs of the poor and for the causes of poverty is seen, therefore, as a moral obligation for individual Christians, for the Church, and for society. Within the framework of the common good, Catholics believe that there is a systematically weighted concern to be responsive to the needs of the poor. In their pastoral letter on Catholic social teaching, *Economic Justice for All*, the bishops of the United States have developed at length the basis for this teaching and its implications for U.S. economic policy.

