



a Kendall Hunt Company

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Sirach 27:30-28:7

Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. 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.

The Word In Liturgy

The Book of Sirach is part of the wisdom literature, a corpus of writings dedicated to showing how the wise person can live in harmony with God's plan for the world and thus fulfill the prescriptions of the Law. 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. Sirach was

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first written in Hebrew at the start of the second century before Christ, but the work as we know it was translated into Greek some years later following the Maccabean revolt. The translation reflects the concern of pious Judaism to counter the attractions of Hellenistic culture. Sirach was not accepted into the Jewish canon of scripture, but the Essene community was familiar with and followed many of its teachings. Protestantism considers it an apocryphal work, but Catholics regard it among the deuterocanonical, inspired books of sacred scripture. Today's selection is a remarkable anticipation of the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer. It is an interesting speculation whether Jesus was influenced by this text in his formulation of the distinctive prayer he taught his disciples (cf. Matthew 6:9-15). Sirach bases his teaching on Israel's experience of God's unmerited and limitless forgiveness. Psalm 103 is an extended meditation on the qualities of the deity, particularly the merciful face of God that Israel had come to know so well through its history of sin and forgiveness. ("The Lord is kind and merciful; slow to anger, and rich in compassion.")

Matthew's discourse on the Church concludes with today's pericope, in which Jesus shows the extent to which community members must be willing to share with others the limitless gift of forgiveness that they themselves have received at God's hands. Peter's question evokes a response from Jesus that turns the blood vengeance of Genesis 4:24 ("If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold") on its head. The parable illustrating this teaching is deliberately fantastic from start to finish: the amount owed by the royal official is astronomically high; the sum he demands from his debtor is absurdly little. Parables typically had but a single point, and the teaching here seems to be about total forgiveness of a debt that is impossible to repay. That, at least, is where our own experience of sinfulness intersects with divine mercy. Like Sirach before him, Matthew wants his reader to understand the connection between God's actions on our behalf and the moral imperative we are under to act likewise toward others. The stern warning at the conclusion seems to be Matthew's addition to underline for his community the urgency of heeding the Lord's teaching on forgiveness.

Catholic Doctrine

Forgiveness

As creatures that are limited and have faults, we confess our sinfulness to God and to one another. And yet, baptized into the mystery of Christ and formed anew as members of the kingdom, we also confess the limitless mercy and love of God. In Jesus, we believers have experienced this mercy and forgiveness of the Most High. It is also in Jesus that we are

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commanded to forgive one another inasmuch as God has forgiven us.

This Sunday's gospel passage is the crowning summary of Jesus' teaching to his Church and, as such, reflects a strong theme in his life and his ministry—forgiveness of others. This theme is also taken up in the way in which Jesus taught his disciples to pray and during his final moments upon the cross when he spoke words of forgiveness to those who tortured and killed him.

Catholics are called to emulate the example given to us in Christ. We know therefore that the mercy of God that is poured out for us in Jesus' saving life, ministry, and sacrifice will never penetrate into the depths of our hearts as long as our attitude toward those who have wronged us remains frozen in hatred and ill will (CCC 2840). Indeed, deliberately hating others and wishing them great harm is considered by the Church as a grave or mortal sin that fractures our relationship with God (CCC 2303). The Church recognizes that forgiving those who have wronged us is a daunting task, given our human nature, but it is a task that has been enjoined upon us by Jesus. The Lord is unequivocal, saying, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father..." (Matthew 5:44).

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The Master not only taught his disciples to forgive and love their enemies, he also lived his own teaching perfectly. When he hung dying upon the cross, his thoughts went beyond his own pain (and what would have been justifiable anger) to pray for his torturers. Jesus interceded for them, saying, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

The Church teaches that forgiveness of one's enemies is the culmination of the disciple's prayer, for in extending mercy to those who have wronged us we are transformed—brought closer to Christ and configured to the Master who showed us the way. This path of reconciliation proves that love is stronger than sin and conquers the worst this world offers (CCC 2844). Forgiveness of enemies and those who have hurt us is not only something upheld in the words and deeds of Jesus but is embedded by the Lord in the prayer that he has given us disciples, a prayer text that perfectly expresses the Good News of God in Jesus (CCC 2763). Thus, by truly praying this prayer every day and meditating upon its stanzas, disciples

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of Jesus are formed from the inside out as their hearts are attuned to the words of the Master who plants within them compassion, gratitude, and love. In the Lord's Prayer we ask the Father to "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors..." (Matthew 6:12). The two parts of this verse turn upon that tiny word "as." As expressed in this prayer, it is not possible to keep Jesus' commandment to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34, Matthew 5:48, and Luke 6:36) without internalizing the merciful love of God and then offering that same gift to others, including our enemies (CCC 2842).

