

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

## **The Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time —Year C**

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*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

## Reading I

### Sirach 27:4-7

When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear;  
so do one's faults when one speaks.  
As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace,  
so in tribulation is the test of the just.  
The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had;  
so too does one's speech disclose the bent of one's mind.  
Praise no one before he speaks,  
for it is then that people are tested.

## Responsorial Psalm

### Psalm 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

R (cf. 2a) **Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.**  
It is good to give thanks to the LORD,  
to sing praise to your name, Most High,  
To proclaim your kindness at dawn  
and your faithfulness throughout the night.  
R **Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.**

The just one shall flourish like the palm tree,  
like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow.  
They that are planted in the house of the LORD  
shall flourish in the courts of our God.  
R **Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.**

They shall bear fruit even in old age;  
vigorous and sturdy shall they be,  
Declaring how just is the LORD,  
my rock, in whom there is no wrong.  
R **Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.**

## Reading II

### 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Brothers and sisters:

When this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility  
and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality,  
then the word that is written shall come about:

*Death is swallowed up in victory.*

*Where, O death, is your victory?*

*Where, O death, is your sting?*

The sting of death is sin,  
and the power of sin is the law.  
But thanks be to God who gives us the victory  
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters,  
be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord,  
knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

## Alleluia

### Philippians 2:15d, 16a

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Shine like lights in the world  
as you hold on to the word of life.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

## Gospel

### Luke 6:39-45

Jesus told his disciples a parable,  
“Can a blind person guide a blind person?  
Will not both fall into a pit?  
No disciple is superior to the teacher;  
but when fully trained,  
every disciple will be like his teacher.  
Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye,  
but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?  
How can you say to your brother,  
‘Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,’  
when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye?  
You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first;  
then you will see clearly  
to remove the splinter in your brother’s eye.

“A good tree does not bear rotten fruit,  
nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit.  
For every tree is known by its own fruit.  
For people do not pick figs from thornbushes,  
nor do they gather grapes from brambles.  
A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good,  
but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil;  
for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.”

# Exegesis

## Sirach 27:4-7

*Sirach* was promulgated approximately 180 years before Christ. It was written in Hebrew by a man named Ben Sira who was a Jewish person living in Jerusalem. *Sirach* gets its name from the transliteration of the name *Sira* into the Greek *Sirach*. The book was translated into Greek by Ben Sira's grandson several years later.

Ben Sira was a well-educated Jew who dedicated his life to a study of the Law and the Prophets. He was a highly respected scribe and teacher, who ran an academy for young Jewish men.<sup>1</sup> He was concerned with the growing Hellenistic influence on the people and in particular its negative influence on orthodox Jewish Religion. He viewed the influence as a dilution of authentic fidelity to Yahweh.

*Sirach* is a beautiful collection of wisdom and poetry. The original title in Hebrew was *The Wisdom of Yeshua* (Jesus) ben (son of) *Eleazar ben Sira*.<sup>2</sup> *Sirach* begins "Praise of Wisdom. All wisdom comes from the Lord and with him it remains forever... Before all things else wisdom was created, and prudent understanding from eternity. To whom has wisdom's root been revealed? Who knows her subtleties? There is but one, wise and truly awe-inspiring, seated upon his throne: It is the Lord; he created her... He has poured her forth upon all his works." (Sir 1: 1-8). In contrast with Greek philosophy which viewed wisdom as a human attribute flowing from within, *Sirach* reveals wisdom as a gift from God. God is the creator and the source of wisdom, and He chooses to pour out His wisdom upon creation. "With wisdom and knowledge, He fills them; good and evil He shows them." (Sir 17: 6).

*Sirach* proclaims: "The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord." (Sir 1: 12). God pours His Wisdom upon those who stand in awe of Him, as creature stands before Creator.

The posture of *fear of the Lord*, a state of being in which one inherits wisdom, runs throughout the teachings of *Sirach*. It sets the stage for our pericope today. "For the sake of profit many sin, and the struggle for wealth blinds the eyes. Like a peg driven between fitted stones, between buying and selling sin is wedged in. Unless you earnestly hold fast to **fear of the Lord**, suddenly your house will be thrown down." (Sir 27: 1-3).

*So in his conversation is the test of the man*. In his speech, in his conversation a person reveals the wisdom or the lack of wisdom that he possesses. Unlike the power of the oratory, and the power of the persuasive speech of the great philosopher, wisdom is not in the words, it is merely revealed (or not) by the words. The words reveal what is within the person. From which inner storeroom are the words rising, the store of good or the store of evil?

*The fruit of the tree shows the care it has had*. As a teacher Ben Sira is concerned with the diligence of the student. Fear of the Lord is just the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom must be nurtured and cared for and assimilated into a person's life. The result of that care or lack thereof can be measured in a person's conversation and speech. It becomes the visible tangible manifestation of an internal reality or state of being.

Jesus clarifies this image in the parable, *A Tree Known by its Fruit*. He makes a contrast between a good tree and a rotten tree which are distinguishable in themselves, even before their fruit is produced. Jesus then directs us even deeper into the store that lies within.

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1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; page 496

2. Ibid.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Psalm 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

Psalm 92 consists of sixteen verses and is titled *A Hymn of Thanksgiving for God's Fidelity – A Psalm. A Sabbath Song.*

Psalm 92 is a song of thanksgiving praising God for His wonderful works. It contrasts those who are filled with gratitude and joy as a response to God and those who reject God and lack wisdom, i.e., the wicked.

*Lord, it is good to give thanks to You.* Gratitude is a proper response to God. Gratitude is a dimension of love. Gratitude is an attribute of God, who is love. In the Gospels, time and time again we see Jesus giving thanks to the Father. Even as He is facing His Passion Jesus is raising His eyes to heaven and giving thanks. To be a follower of Jesus is to be filled with gratitude. Like faith, hope and love, gratitude is both gift and response.

*Like the palm tree... planted in the house of the Lord.* Two weeks ago, we read from Psalm 1, which gives us the image of the tree planted near living water. Scripture also gives us the image of that living water flowing from the temple, from the house of the Lord. From Psalm 36 for example: “How precious is your love, O God! We take refuge in the shadow of your wings. We feast on the rich food of your house; from the delightful stream you give us to drink. For with you is the fountain of life.” (Ps 36: 8-9). The Prophet Ezekiel give us the beautiful image of the life-giving water flowing from the threshold of the temple, giving life and transforming everything in its path, turning salt water into fresh life-giving water: “Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water flowing from beneath the threshold of the temple... wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live.” (Ez 47: 1, 9).

*They shall bear fruit, even in old age.* Like the tree planted near living-water that remains green and bears fruit even in a time of drought, the tree that is planted in the house of the Lord will bear fruit even beyond its normal fruit bearing years. Its life comes from a deeper source that is God.

*Declaring, how just is the Lord, my Rock.* The image of God as Rock appears over 200 times in Sacred Scripture. The Hebrew word is *sur* and the Greek is *Petra*. It evokes an image of immutability and strength, an image of security and support, and a stability that God gives to life in a world that is in a constant state of flux. The Rock also is a source of life-giving water. As the people were dying of thirst in the desert, “Moses lifted his hand and struck the Rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly.” (Num 20:11). St. Paul later declared that the Rock in the desert was Christ: “All drank of the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the Rock was the Christ.” (1 Cor 10: 4).

## Exegesis (Continued)

### 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

In our passage from *1 Corinthians* St. Paul is addressing some arrant thinking among the fledgling Church at Corinth. The issue is stated clearly in verse twelve: “But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection from the dead?” (1 Cor 15:12). It is not surprising that the Church at Corinth would be influenced by Hellenistic philosophy. The Greek philosophers envisioned a separation of the soul from the body at death, i.e., the soul being set free from the fallen and darkened and transient corporeal realm. Among the Jews a small group of Sadducees also believed that there was no resurrection of the body.

St. Paul begins his argument for the resurrection of the body by focusing on the resurrection of Jesus. The Risen Lord appeared to Paul, the apostles, and many others for a reason, to show us life beyond the grave. Jesus died on the Cross for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. There are many witnesses to these historical events. Jesus spent three days in the tomb to validate that His death was real. He rose from the dead and appeared in His glorified body, a body that was real and recognizable, with visible wounds from the Cross, yet He was able to appear in the Upper Room although the doors were locked. His appearances affirm the reality of the resurrection of the body.

Belief in bodily resurrection had already been revealed in the OT. “But the dead shall rise, their corpses shall rise; awake and sing, you who lie in the dust.” (Is 26:19). “Thus says the Lord God to these bones: See! I will bring My Spirit into you that you may come to life.” (Ez 37: 5). Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; Some shall live forever; others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.” (Dan 12:2). “You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever.” (2 Mac 7:9). Note that the earliest of these OT passages, i.e. from Isaiah, dates back to 740 B.C. The resurrection of the body to eternal life, while made visible in the Risen Lord, was not new to the Jewish faith.

When we think of the various resurrection appearances of Jesus we tend to focus on those appearances to the apostles and others as revealed in the four Gospels. These appearances all occur between the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus. After the Ascension, the Risen Lord also appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. St. Paul acknowledges his calling from the Lord, and like Peter, he too is aware of his own unworthiness. Perhaps this is particularly difficult for Paul in that he was violently attacking the early Church. Jesus makes no distinction between Himself and His Church when he exclaims, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” (Acts 9:4). Paul not only uses his experience of the Risen Lord in his arguments supporting the resurrection of the body, but he bases his authority on his personal calling from the Risen Lord, Himself.

To further his argument for the resurrection of the body, Paul calls upon two scripture passages in our pericope today. The first is from the Prophet Isaiah: “On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever.” (Is 25: 7-8). The second is a direct quotation from the Prophet Hosea: “Shall I deliver them from the power of the nether world? Shall I redeem them from death? Where are your plagues, O death! **Where is your sting?**” (Hos 13:14). The moment that Jesus died on the Cross the temple veil was rent in two from top to bottom. On the mountain of Calvary Jesus destroyed the veil that veiled all people. He destroyed death forever for those who love Him. The victory has been won. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of a great banquet that is prepared for all who die with Christ. To sit at that table requires a resurrected body!

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Luke 6:39-45

In our Gospel scene, Jesus went up the mountain and spent the night in prayer. As morning arrived, He chose His twelve apostles. “And He came down with them and stood on a stretch of level ground. A crowd of His disciples and a large number of people from all of Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases... (Lk 6:17:18). Tyre and Sidon is Gentile territory. This inclusivity is an ongoing theme of Luke. (See also 2:31-32; 3:6; 4:24-27).

The imagery of Jesus coming down from the mountain after a night of prayer evokes the scene of Moses who came down from the mountain and set the Law before the Israelites. (See Exod 19:20-23, 33; Deut 4:44, 26:19). Now Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the Law, wishes to write a higher law on our hearts. It is the law of Love, absolute self-giving love.

In our pericope today Jesus continues His teaching in what is referred to as the Sermon on the Plain. The teaching began with the blessings and woes that we call the Beatitudes. It continued with His radical call to love and bless our enemies. In our passage today Jesus is teaching us not to judge others and to bear fruit that will produce in our lives from being connected to the source of grace that lies within. In the Gospel passage that follows Jesus will teach us to build the houses of our lives on the rock foundation that faith in Him provides.

*Can a blind person guide a blind person.* In terms of blindness, Jesus is talking not about physical blindness but of spiritual blindness. He is referring to those who have not yet been enlightened with the eyes of faith. St. Paul will later use this analogy in *Romans* speaking of spiritual teaching: “If you are confident that you are a guide for the blind and a light for those in darkness... (Rom 2: 19).

The image of the splinter in your brother’s eye and the beam in your own follows from the parable of blindness and the ability to see. In this case it is spiritual sight that is again in question. The first step in spiritual development and growth is the interior examine. The hypocrisy that Jesus talks about comes from a lack of spiritual self-awareness. Jesus is the Truth and He must be met at the level of Truth. We must first be authentic and aware of our spiritual shortcomings. In the Gospels, Jesus met people where they were. He dined with tax collectors and known sinners. Jesus had the most difficult time with hypocrisy, with those who did not practice what they preached, and those that saw themselves as superior to others. Jesus will meet us where we are, but we must be there in tune with our true selves to meet Jesus.

*A Tree Known by its Fruit.* Jesus makes a contrast between a good tree and a rotten tree which are distinguishable in themselves, even before their fruit is produced. Jesus then directs us even deeper into the store that lies within. The battle between good and evil is waged in the human heart and the depth of the soul. Jesus talks about the storeroom of grace that is within each one of us. It is His indwelling Spirit that is a gift to us at our baptism. Jesus contrasts that gift with store of evil that is within us due to original sin, the collective sin of humanity and our own sinfulness in what we have done and in what we have failed to do. It is up to each one of us to close the door on the darkness that seeks to rise in our lives and to open ourselves to the font of grace that seeks to bear fruit in and through us. It is up to us enlightened by Christ, to make the right choices every moment of our lives.



## Reflection

It seems that every time I meet with my spiritual director, he tells me the same thing, “Go deeper.” I have been going deeper for twenty years now. I am finding that this inner journey has no limits, and it has no end. This inner journey has been extremely fruitful in my spiritual life, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Within each one of us lies a storeroom filled with amazing treasures. It is the storeroom that Jesus talks about in this weekend’s Gospel. It is a storeroom filled with goodness and mercy, light and truth, joy and gratitude, and peace and love. It is the ground of our being. It lies in the depth of our soul. It is the Spirit of the Risen Lord that dwells deep within each of us by the grace of our baptism.

A couple of weeks ago, the Word of God was centered on the image of the tree planted near a flowing stream, with its roots drawing from the living, life-giving, water. It is a tree that flourishes and bears fruit in plenty and in drought because of where it is planted and where its roots lie. This weekend the Word of God is centered on the tree that is planted in the House of God, the dwelling place of God, the inner most man, the soul, that holds this storeroom of love and grace.

It is sad that many people do not open the door of this divine storeroom. Perhaps some do not even know that it is there. Many are so busy living on the surface or in the shallows of life and they never cast their nets into the deep. To complicate matters the devil has a way of misleading and misguiding us to keep us from discovering this amazing treasure.

Perhaps some people discover this treasure and in the bright light of Truth are convicted in their way of life and they quickly close the door. My personal experience is that it is often a painful experience to see areas of sin and darkness in my life that I did not see before. Seeing things in my life that are not of God require change and often some self-surgery. St. John of the Cross likened this inner burning light to a flame of love. The heat of this flame burns and the resulting pain amounts to a cauterization of a wound, a wounded heart. This can be a painful process, but it is one that leads to healing and life. This inner light helps us to see the beams in our own eyes, and that allows us to see God and world clearly, through the prism of love.

In the passage that immediately follows our Gospel this weekend Jesus tells the parable of the person who built his house on rock in contrast to the person who built his house on sand. Unless we anchor into the Rock within us that is God, we are building the houses of our lives on the shifting sands of this world. As we approach the holy season of Lent, as we journey with Jesus to Calvary, I challenge you, with me, to fortify our lives built on the House of God. Together let’s open the storeroom of love and mercy, grace and truth, peace and joy, and let God bear fruit in our lives, in our families, and in our communities.

For this we need God’s help and so we pray, come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle within us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Christ,



## Personal Witness

In my reflection I focused on the inner storeroom of grace. Jesus also talks about a store of evil within each of us. Evil is real. It is a part of our world and of our lives. From the moment that Satan turned from God's love, evil entered God's creation. Satan was there in the Garden of Eden to tempt our first parents. From the moment of the Fall evil has been a part of our fallen human nature. God allows evil to exist. It provides a level "playing field" from which we live and exercise our free-will. It is a necessary dimension of Love. Love must be free, or it would not be love.

I graduated Catholic high school in 1970. One of the books on our required reading list for freshman humanities class was William Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies*. It is a story that has had a lasting impact on my life. It is a fictitious story of a group of English school boys that end up stranded on a deserted island. Left to themselves with no adult supervision they quickly turn quite savage. As an adolescent struggling with conflicting inner desires, the plot seemed very real and altogether plausible. It is a story of the worst of human nature manifesting itself in a society gone bad.

William Golding, a British Novelist, was a naval officer who was part of the invasion force at Normandy on June 6, 1944. During the darkness of World War II, Golding saw the worst of human nature, the almost unfathomable evils that were part of that dark period of human history. Mr. Golding first titled his book *Strangers from Within* but later changed the title to *Lord of the Flies*, which is a literal translation of the name that Jesus used for Satan, *Beelzebul*. The plot certainly portrays the manifestation of evil throughout the story.

*Lord of the Flies* was first published in 1954. Just a few years later in June of 1965 a similar story was unfolding, and this time it was real. Six Catholic schoolboys from Tonya, ages 13 to 16, decided to play hooky from school and go on a fishing trip. They "borrowed" a boat from a local fisherman, got caught in a storm and drifted aimlessly for 8 days. Miraculously they ended up marooned on a small, deserted island where they survived for 15 months. Their story is much different than Golding's novel. They worked together as a team to survive the harsh conditions of the island. They prayed together every morning and every evening. They organized themselves and divided up daily tasks and responsibilities. They settled their conflicts peacefully with kindness and love. They planted and cared for a garden. They found some chickens that had been able to survive unattended for over 100 years which was when the last inhabitants left the island. The chickens provided them with eggs and an occasional chicken dinner. One of the boys broke his leg falling from a cliff. The others worked together to set the broken leg, and everyone pitched in to cover the injured boy's duties.

On Sunday September 11, 1966, the boys were discovered by a fisherman who saw their signal fire. The doctor who examined the boys, who were once given up for dead, was amazed at how well they fared, given the harsh conditions that they endured for the past 15 months. The boy's leg had healed perfectly, and everyone was healthy and well fit.

This story with a happy ending gives us a sharp contrast to Golding's dark novel. Jesus tells both stories, He tells a parable of the inner store of grace and the inner store of evil within the human heart. Both exist. The storeroom that we open and tap into will influence the story that we write with our lives. It is up to each one of us to make those choices. May God help us!

