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FOR THE LEAST OF OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS

By Sister Katherine "Kit" Gray, CSJ

Introduction

The Book of Sirach is one of the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. Also known as Ecclesiasticus, the book was written between 200-175 B.C. The author offers a collection of simple statements about good living—wisdom, right speech, humility, poverty and wealth, and friendship. In the passage offered for reflection today, Sirach equates true worship with justice and with God's preferential care for the poor.

From the Book of Sirach

*To keep the law is a great oblation,
and the one who observes the commandments
sacrifices a peace offering.*

*In works of charity, one offers fine flour
and when he gives alms, he presents his sacrifice of praise. ...*

*In a generous spirit, pay homage to the Lord,
be not sparing of freewill gifts.
With each contribution show a cheerful countenance,
And pay your tithes in a spirit of joy. ...
The Lord is a God of justice,
who knows no favorites.
Though not unduly partial toward the weak,
yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.
The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,
nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint. ...
The one who serves God willingly is heard;
his petition reaches the heavens.
The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;
it does not rest till it reaches its goal,
nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds,
judges justly and affirms the right,
and the Lord will not delay.*

SIRACH 35:1-4, 10-11, 15-17, 20-22

Reflection

I read and reflected on this Scripture passage soon after participating in a conference of Catholic healthcare and social services providers — Pilgrims of Hope: Serving the Vulnerable. “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40) was a consistent theme in the conference presentations.

Love and true worship of God cannot be separated from love for and practical care for others. God’s preferential love and care for the poor — as expressed in the words of Sirach and exemplified in Christ’s life and mission — has become the Church’s preferential option for the poor.

The Catholic Catechism states: “The Church’s love for the poor . . . is a part of her constant tradition. This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor” (CC #2444).

“... those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere” (CC#2448).

And, just this month, Pope Leo XIV's writing in his first Apostolic Exhortation (Dilexi Te) addressed "to all Christians" is clear and challenging: "Love for the Lord, then, is one with love for the poor. The same Jesus who tells us, 'The poor you will always have with you' (Mt 26:11), also promises the disciples: 'I am with you always' (Mt 28:20). We likewise think of his saying: 'Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me' (Mt 25:40). This is not a matter of mere human kindness but a revelation: contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history. In the poor, he continues to speak to us" (5).



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For Pondering

- Read the Scripture again with an “ear” and a heart for the connection between worship, justice, and care for the poor.
- How are worship, justice, and care for the poor connected in your life?

For Prayer

O Lord, Son of Man, salvation of the world, deprive us not of the food to give to you, who are hungry and poor, without agency, access, and authority—you, our Beloved.

O Lord, Glorious One, salvation of the world, deprive us not of the water to lift to your lips, who thirst, quietly suffering—you, Beautiful One.

O Lord, Gatherer of all nations, salvation of the world, deprive us not of the doors, the table, and the bed to invite you into, you who are homeless, you our stranger, you our refugee, you, invisible and hidden—you, Precious One.

O Lord, Shepherd of your beloved ones, salvation of the world, deprive us not of the clothes to warm you, blankets to shelter you, masks to protect you—you, who are naked, who are exposed to danger and threat, you who are trembling and afraid—you, Holy One.

O Lord, King of the world, salvation of the world, deprive us not of your company as we visit you who are sick, and suffering, lonely, and oppressed.

Help us to find you, lonely and forsaken, fearful and feared—you, our Teacher.

O Lord, Inheritor of all things, salvation of the world, deprive us not of your company as we come to you, imprisoned and forgotten, condemned and cast away by us, the righteous bearing stones—you our brother and sister.

O Lord, grant us courage, boldness, and most of all faith and joy and wonder in you and your steadfast love and power and strength.

CRAIG DOERKSEN, MATTHEW 25 INITIATIVE

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