

THE SIXTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME – A

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THE SEASON OF LENT BEGINS

FEBRUARY 15 – 21, 2026

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Sunday

WISDOM IN SIRACH AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

From A Reflection of Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.

Sirach, also known as Ecclesiasticus, is full of wonderful images and wise sayings about most aspects of life. The whole book centers around the depth, presence, and practicality of wisdom. This spirit, this awareness, this sensitivity, is a participation in the divine. God knows all, created all, loves all, and allows us human beings to participate in that wisdom, while also granting us the freedom to exercise just how deeply or to what extent we will share it.

If you have time and interest, it would be very helpful to read and listen to both the chapter before this one from which today's verses are taken, and this entire chapter. The whole Jewish "law" is complete with God's wisdom, and God has shared it with humanity. Wisdom is living the "law," not merely keeping it out of fear. The many aspects of the "law" of Moses were meant to guide and invite God's people to live in harmony, prosperity, and fertility. Wisdom is God's way, and we are choosers. We have been given the gift, or burden, of our freedom. Our wisdom is using our knowledge according to our faith in God's ways.

Wisdom is received by sensing, listening to, and living through the experience of choices. It is experience-based, but that includes the ponderings, wonderings, and strugglings it takes to make choices, and then the patience to live the consequences. It is all about listening and hearing.

Today's continuation of the Sermon on the Mount contains twenty long verses about what has been heard in the past and what is to be listened to now. Jesus is not spinning the Law and the traditions passed on through the prophets. He is applying a proper spirit to what has become too legalistic. In a sense, the dictates of the "law" were for the head to inform or guide the five senses. The spirit of Jesus is to form the heart as well as the mind.

The ways of Jesus invite us to let go of exactness and conformity for the sake of slavish fear of being punished or excluded. This whole sermon, at the beginning of Jesus' preaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, is not meant for exact execution, but for our interiorizing the mind and heart of Jesus. It is not about doing this or not doing that. It is about the "why" of our doing anything. For instance, we are encouraged not to lust sexually in our relationships with each other, but why not? It is about the reverence of the human body and the sacredness of love and life that is important. This sacredness of life extends to killing all forms of human life as well. Killing relationships with our brothers and sisters is a violation of the new way of living the Old Law as well.

This is a long Gospel today, and the whole Sermon takes much pondering. We here in the United States love the exactness of the laws, so we know what's right and how we can get around or through or under or above what is written. God so loved the world that God sent a Relational Person to share the sacredness of our lives and the sacredness of God's relationship with us. The Wisdom of Jesus is not "how" he lived, but the "why." He came and continues to come, respectful of our freedom, to encourage us to reverence our lives, the time we have, and the lives and times we have with others.

Monday

DWELLING IN THE SHELTER OF GOD'S LOVE

A Reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

We are called to dwell in God's protection. We are told that to dwell under God's protection is to dwell in safety. We understand best what we are called to by considering three kinds of people who don't dwell there.

The first lacks hope, the second has given up hoping, and the third hopes in vain. Those who lack hope trust in themselves rather than God. Those who are giving up hope are those who despair of ever getting what they seek. Those who hope in vain live in sin. They flatter themselves so much with the thought of God's mercy that they never bother to amend their sinful ways. There is no love in this, and that is their downfall.

The first group mentioned dwell in personal merits, the second dwells in personal woes, and the third in personal vices. What is more foolish than to dwell in a half-built house? When a person has just begun to build a dwelling place for God, that person can't act as though it were finished. That's what one does if one doesn't live in hope. That is the situation of those who think their merits are enough to bring them to God. The only people who dwell in the shelter of God's presence are those whose sole desire is to receive it and whose sole fear is that they might lose it and who ponder it carefully day by day.

Is there under heaven anything that can harm a person whom the God of Heaven has decided to protect? So, nothing better can be sought than to dwell in the protection of the God of Heaven. We are taught not only to seek God so that we may avoid evil but to seek to be with God always so that we may do good.

Be careful to pay close attention to the saying: "The one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide under the protection of the God of Heaven; such a one will say to the Lord, You are my protector!" This Scripture speaks of living under the protection of God and not in the presence of God. Angels rejoice in God's presence. All we ask is to be able to abide under God's protection. All I ask is to be secure in God's protection.

There is no doubt that God is everywhere. But God is in heaven in a way that makes God's presence on earth seem as nothing. So, when we pray, we say "Our Father, who art in Heaven". Our soul is in the whole of our body, but it seems more especially to be in the

head, where all the senses meet. The head seems in some way to govern the other members of a person, and so the person seems to dwell in the head more than in the other members. In the same way, we say the very presence of God is in Heaven and can scarcely feel the same about the protection of God as we would about God's presence. God is our protector. We long yet for God's presence. To be in God's presence, we are willing to surrender everything. We are led there by a love which counts nothing as so wonderful as coming to be in God's very presence. It is for this that we hope with all our heart and strength.

Tuesday

RESIST TEMPTATION

From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis on Tuesday, 18 February 2014

Temptation presents itself to us in subtle ways, infecting the whole environment that surrounds us, and always causes us to look for justifications. In the end, it causes us to fall into sin and encloses us in a cage from which it is difficult to escape. To resist temptation, it is necessary to listen to the Word of God, because "he is waiting for us", and he always gives us confidence and opens new horizons before us. In the Letter of St James (1:12-18), the apostle, "after having spoken to us yesterday of patience... speaks to us today of resistance; the resistance to temptation. Each person is tempted by his own passions, which attract and seduce him. Then the passions conceive and create sin, and once that sin is committed, it brings forth death".

But where does temptation come from? How does it act within us? The Apostle tells us that sin does not come from God but from our passions, from our inner weaknesses, from the wounds that original sin has left within us. That is where temptation comes from. Initially, temptation "begins soothingly", but "then it grows. Jesus himself spoke about this when he told the parable of the seeds and the weeds (Mt 13: 24-30). The seeds grew, but the weeds planted by the enemy also grew. This is how temptation grows, it grows and grows. If one does not stop it, then it occupies everything", and that is when infection occurs. Temptation grows, "and it hates solitude; it will try to spread to another to have company. This is how it accumulates people, spreading to others". The third feature is justification; "we justify ourselves in order to feel fine with ourselves".

Temptation has always justified itself, "since the first original sin," when Adam blames Eve for convincing him to eat the forbidden fruit. Through this growth, infection and justification, it "locks us in a place where you cannot easily escape". "This is what happened to the Apostles who were in the boat: they had forgotten to bring bread," and began to blame each other and discuss who had made the mistake of forgetting it. "Jesus looked at them, and I think that he smiled as he watched them. And he said to them: do

you remember the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod? Take heed, beware!" Yet they "did not understand anything, because they were so caught up in blame that they did not have room for anything else, they did not have light to understand the Word of God".

The same happens "when we fall into temptation. We do not hear the Word of God, and we do not understand. Jesus had to remind them of the multiplication of the loaves, to help them get out of the mindset that they were in. This happens because temptation closes every horizon, "and in this way leads us to sin". When we are being tempted, "only the Word of God, the Word of Jesus, can save us. Listening to His Word opens horizons", because "he is always ready to help us escape from temptations. Jesus is great because not only does he help us to get out of temptation, but he also gives us more faith". Therefore, Jesus not only expects to help us escape temptation, but he also trusts us. This is a great strength, "because he always opens up new horizons," while, through temptation, the devil "closes and develops environments which cause you to fight" and "seek justification for accusing others".

Wednesday

ASHES REMIND US WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE HOPE TO BE

From the Homily of Pope Francis, March 5, 2025

First, we must *remember*. We bow our heads in order to receive the ashes as if to look at ourselves, to look within ourselves. Indeed, the ashes help to remind us that our lives are fragile and insignificant: we are dust, from dust we were created, and to dust we shall return. We learn this above all through the experience of our own fragility: our weariness, the weaknesses we have to come to terms with, the fears that dwell in us, the failures that consume us, the fleetingness of our dreams, and the realisation that what we possess is ephemeral. We experience fragility through illness, poverty, the hardships that can suddenly befall us and our families, in the social and political realities of our time, through ideological opposition, the abuse of power, the re-emergence of old ideologies based on identity that advocate exclusion, the exploitation of the earth's resources, violence in all its forms, and war between peoples. This "toxic dust" clouds the air of our planet, impeding peaceful coexistence, while uncertainty and the fear of the future continue to increase.

Furthermore, the condition of fragility reminds us of the tragedy of death. In many ways, we try to banish death from our societies, so dependent on appearances, and even remove it from our language. Death, however, imposes itself as a reality with which we have to reckon, a sign of the precariousness and brevity of our lives. Despite the masks we wear and the cleverly crafted ploys meant to distract us, the ashes remind us of who we are. This is good for us. It reshapes us, reduces the severity of our narcissism, brings us back to reality, and makes us more humble and open to one another: none of us is God; we are all on a journey.

Lent, however, is also an invitation to rekindle our *hope*. Although we receive the ashes

with our heads bowed in remembrance of who we are, the Lenten season does not end there. On the contrary, we are invited to lift our eyes to the One who rises from the depths of death and brings us from the ashes of sin and death to the glory of eternal life. The ashes remind us of the hope to which we are called in Jesus, the Son of God, who has taken upon himself the dust of the earth and raised it to the heights of heaven. He descended into the abyss of dust, dying for us and reconciling us to the Father, as we heard from Saint Paul: “For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21).

This, brothers and sisters, is the hope that restores to life the “ashes” of our lives. Without such hope, we are doomed passively to endure the fragility of our human condition. Particularly when faced with the experience of death, a lack of hope can lead us to fall into sadness and desolation, and we end up reasoning like fools: “Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end [...] the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air” (Wis 2:1-3). Yet the hope of Easter that we journey towards reassures us of God’s forgiveness. Even while submerged in the ashes of sin, hope opens us up to the joyful acknowledgment of life: “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth” (Job 19:25). Let us remember this: “Man is dust and to dust he shall return, but dust is precious in God’s eyes because God created man, destining him to immortality” (Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, 17 February 2010).

Brothers and sisters, having received the ashes, we walk towards the hope of Easter. Let us turn back to God. Let us return to him with all our hearts (cf. *Joel* 2:12). Let us place him at the centre of our lives, so that the memory of what we are — fragile and mortal as ashes scattered upon the wind — may finally be filled with the hope of the Risen Lord.

Thursday

THE WOUNDS OF THE SAVIOR

From St. Bernard's *Sermon on the Song of Songs*

Where can the weak find a place of firm security and peace, except in the wounds of the Savior? Indeed, the more secure my place there, the more he can do to help me. The world rages, the flesh is heavy, and the devil lays his snares, but I do not fall, for my feet are planted on firm rock. I may have sinned gravely. My conscience would be distressed, but it would not be in turmoil, for I would recall the wounds of the Lord. He was wounded for our iniquities. What sin is there so deadly that it cannot be pardoned by the death of Christ? And so if I bear in mind this strong, effective remedy, I can never again be terrified by the malignancy of sin.

Surely the man who said, “My sin is too great to merit pardon,” was wrong. He was speaking as though he were not a member of Christ and had no share in his merits, so that he could claim them as his own, as a member of the body can claim what belongs to the head. As for me, I can appropriate whatsoever I lack from the heart of the Lord who abounds in mercy. They pierced his hands and feet and opened his side with a spear. Through the openings of these wounds, I may drink honey from the rock and oil from the

hardest stone, that is, I may taste and see that the Lord is sweet.

He was thinking thoughts of peace, and I did not know it, for who knows the mind of the Lord, or who had been his counselor? But the piercing nail has become a key to unlock the door, that I may see the goodwill of the Lord. And what can I see as I look through the hole? Both the nail and the wound cry out that God was in Christ reconciling the whole world to himself. The lance pierced his soul and came close to his heart, so that he might be able to feel compassion for me in my weaknesses.

Through these sacred wounds, we can see the secret of his heart, the great mystery of love, the sincerity of his mercy with which he visited us from on high. Where have your love, your mercy, your compassion shone out more luminously than in your wounds, sweet, gentle Lord of mercy? More mercy than this no one has than that he lay down his life for those who are doomed to death.

My merit comes from his mercy, for I do not lack merit so long as he does not lack pity. And if the Lord's mercies are many, then I am rich in merits. For even if I am aware of many sins, what does it matter? Where sin abounded, grace has overflowed. And if the Lord's mercies are from all ages forever, I, too, will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. Will I not sing of my own righteousness? No, Lord, I shall be mindful only of your justice. Yet that, too, is my own; for God has made you my righteousness.

Friday

ST. BASIL AND JESUS ON FASTING

From a Reflection by Fr. Blake Britton from *Word on Fire*

Fasting is among the oldest religious practices in history, and the Catholic Church upholds its dignity and asserts its importance, so we must ask: Why is the Catholic Church adamant about this ancient custom?

St. Basil the Great, in his Lenten homilies, notes that fasting is as old as humanity itself. As a matter of fact, it was the first command human beings received from God: "You shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." According to Basil, it was a failure to fast that led to the fall in Eden. As such, fasting is among the remedies to reacquire the original dignity of our identity as God's children: "It is because we did not fast that we were banished from paradise. So let us fast that we may return to it." In this primordial mandate to fast, Basil

recognized a dual-faceted purpose. Firstly, it aids the soul in acquiring maturity. As any psychologist will recognize, lack of discipline and self-control are clear signs of immaturity. The failure to be patient, make wise decisions, and responsibly enjoy food, drink or relationships represents a severe lapse in human development. This is why practicing self-restraint on a regular basis through fasting is so crucial to the spiritual life. It is not just about giving something up because the Church says so. The more we practice abstinence, the more mature we become, passing from the immaturity of immediate gratification to the maturity of regulated consumption. For fasting is, as Basil wrote, “the companion of sobriety and the craftsman of self-control.”

Thus, fasting helps to foster one virtue in particular – namely, self-control, a quality not so often spoken about in our time. St. Paul identifies it as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” To have self-control is literally “to perfect oneself from within.” This definition helps us to better appreciate St. Basil's second assertion about the consequences of fasting.

According to St. Basil, fasting properly orders the appetites of our body to the good of our soul: “The more you deny the flesh, the more you render the soul radiant with spiritual health.” Here we see the influence of the Desert Father on Basil's spirituality. These early Christians were adamant about the dignity lost by Adam in Eden. They recognize Adam's fault as a failure of discipline. He gave in to his baser desires and lost sight of humanity's lofty vocation as *imago Dei* (the “likeness and image of God”). Thus, monks like Abba John will warn: “One should always guard against attachment [to worldly things]; for this is what's harmful to the soul.”

Jesus himself teaches that “man does not live on bread alone” (Matt. 4:4). Human beings are not animals. We have appetites beyond the carnal. Our wills are not driven by mere instinct. There is supposed to be a deeper reason for our actions. When my stomach hurts from fasting, it is a reminder of the spiritual hunger my soul experiences at every moment of my existence.

We know that fasting was an integral part of Jesus' life, so much so that he spent forty days in the desert, abstaining from worldly sustenance. Nothing the Lord does is coincidental or unplanned. Every event of his life teaches us something profound about our own existence as persons and our vocation as Christians. In Christ's fasting, we see a way by which to share in the divine life of God. By growing in self-control from our immature impulses and properly nourishing our souls through fasting, we will surely grow in intimacy with the Lord who loves us.

Saturday

JOURNEYING THROUGH LENT WITH MARY

A Reflection by Teresa Armstrong from *Catholic Lane*

Lent is a journey. Mary made the journey alongside Jesus during his earthly life. As his mother, Mary carried him in her womb and experienced the pain of Joseph planning to divorce her. She had no place to stay but a stable when it was time for him to be born, and

then she had to put her beloved baby Jesus in a manger for a crib.

Mary trusted in God's will for her son, just as we need to trust in God's will for our lives. She was just as human as we are, feeling physical pain, disappointment and all kinds of heartache. Yet she had an intimate relationship with God, so she must have turned everything over to him.

Lent is a time to become more faithful disciples of our Lord. Mary was Jesus' first and most faithful disciple. She stayed with him during every moment of his life. She was there at the scourging of Jesus at the pillar. During his walk to Golgotha, Mary followed his footsteps and was at the foot of the cross.

In John's Gospel, we read about the disciple taking in Mary. 'When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to her, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home.' by putting ourselves into Mary's hands, she can help form us as disciples.

Mary learned to surrender her will to God's will. From the moment the Angel Gabriel came to announce that she was to be the mother of Jesus, Mary said, "Let it be done to me according to thy word." Lent is about learning to surrender our desires and trust in God.

Meditating on the times in Mary's life when she had to blindly trust shows me the way to trust. From the Annunciation, Nativity, and Presentation, to the Wedding at Cana, and finally with our Lord's Passion and death, Mary died to her desires and trusted in God's plans.

She who loved Jesus most teaches us how to love Christ more each day, and to do whatever he tells us to do. I often think my life is filled with stress and chaos, until I look at the life of Mary and reflect on all the stress and chaos of her life, even though she was the mother of God.

Ultimately, the entirety of Mary's discipleship to her son was through her, a model of surrender. And so there is nothing better I can do this Lent than to surrender to Jesus, and there is no better teacher than his mother.