A God of justice • Breaking open the word

Readings

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18
The LORD is a God of justice,who knows no favorites.

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.

Luke 18:9-14
"…whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

You can read the full text of this Sunday's readings here:

Scriptures for the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Reflection

If today's first reading had an image attached to it, the image might be that of incense. It speaks of how our prayer, "pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal", very much like incense rises to heaven. No word is spoken to God without that word reaching God's ear. No request, praise, thanksgiving, anger, hurt, or lamentation escapes God's notice. We encouraged in this reading with the promise that God does not delay in answering us, but is perfectly attentive and ready to respond. And God always responds with perfect justice.

Paul, as he sits in prison, talks about how alone he was in his defense—that no people were there to support him. But, he knew that he wasn't *really* alone, and that God had never left

his side. God’s faithfulness in his time of need was very apparent to him and he credits God with for giving him the courage to withstand everything he had to go through. He trusts that God will continue to take care of him and praises him as a result.

As always, Jesus brings it all home with a story. Two men were praying: one is a respected member of the community whom everyone assumes is in good standing with God—he has wealth, authority, the esteem of his fellow townspeople—he is a teacher of God’s law and feels justified in judging others. But, he thinks he’s better than everyone one else. He’s actually says, “Thank God I’m not like *them*…” That’s super rude. The tax collector (who the Pharisee is busy being glad he isn’t like) stands before God in humility, recognizing what he has done wrong and apologizing for it. Nobody in the community likes tax collectors (see the story of Zacchaeus next week!); no one that is, except for God. When we pray, God wants us to speak the truth—to tell God what is really on our hearts and minds—and to be open to what God has to say to us. By believing that he was perfect, the Pharisee wasn’t open to receiving anything from God—not forgiveness, not healing, not any gift. Instead of letting God judge him, he did it himself. It’s really rather blasphemous—only God has the right to judge, and he made himself equal to God by making himself the judge. By acknowledging that he needed help, the tax collector was open to receiving every good gift, every help that God has to offer. He allowed God to judge him, and God judged him worthy of love and mercy. God always responds to whatever prayer we offer. God is always faithful. And God wants us to trust all of our feelings and failures to God so that God can fill us with good things and replace what is not good for us.

Break open the word with your family

Kids

Incense is a symbol of our prayers rising to heaven. What other things can you imagine are like our prayers going up to God?

Teens

Have you ever caught yourself thinking, “Thank God I’m not like *them*.” Or, have you ever heard anyone else say that? What could you (or they) replace that sort of judgement with if you ever catch yourself thinking that way again?

Adults

With what attitude do you approach God when you pray? Does it change depending on the situation? Do you always speak your mind when talking to God? If you ever hold back, what is it that makes you do so?

A little lectio

The ancient practice of prayerfully reflecting on bits of Scripture is known as *lectio divina*. Want to try it out with your family? Head over to Lectio Divina for Kids to find out how to adapt this prayer practice for your kids.

A little Bible study

Want to do a little Bible study with your kids? Here are some tips:

- During Ordinary Time, the Church pairs the Old Testament and New Testament readings in a way that each sheds light on the other. Ask your kids to look for the common theme connecting the two readings. (Sometimes it’s obvious, sometimes it is subtle.) How does the “dialogue” between the readings help you understand them better?

- Get a New American Bible, Revised Edition, and take a look at the footnotes for these readings. How do they change your understanding of what is going on?
- Take a look at the context for the readings—what happens before, or after?
- Read the NABRE's introduction to the book of the Bible that the readings are taken from. How does that help you understand the readings?
- If you don't have a copy of the NABRE at home, you can view it online at the USCCB website at the Daily Readings web page.

For even more resources for breaking open this Sunday's readings, head over to The Sunday Website.