

“God’s justice *happens.*” (Homily)

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February 12, 2017 – 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Lectionary: 76; Sirach 15:15-20)

If you choose, you can keep the commandments, they will save you;
if you trust in God, you too shall live;
he has set before you fire and water;
to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand.

(Sirach 15:15-16)

When I was a little boy, just age three, God gave me a great gift. *He slowed me down.* In fact, he stopped me cold, but let’s not split hairs. It was summer, and my parents had rented a cabin on Candlewood Lake. It was beautiful, and I was having fun. I splashed in the water, and played on the little beach close to our cabin.

Then, I couldn’t breathe.

I guess I was getting *some* air in and out of my lungs, because I didn’t turn *blue*, but I remember being bundled up and riding into town to see a doctor. “It’s *asthma*,” the doctor said, and it sure did slow me down! In fact, it changed the course of my life forever. So many things I *might* have done, had *asthma* not gotten in the way.

My doctors patched me up as best they could with the crude medications of the day. At least I could *walk* without wheezing—and do schoolwork—but that was about it. Sports and rough-and-tumble play, almost all physical “boy-stuff,” was forbidden. (In truth, I didn’t need much forbidding, as my lungs told me to stop long before my parents or a teacher would.)

And so, instead of doing, I *watched*. Instead of playing, I *observed*. Instead of laughing—which made me wheeze—I *pondered*. “I took it all in,” as they say, content to breathe, as best I could.

But it was a *gift*, a great gift from God! For as I watched, and observed, and pondered, it came to me that *God’s order* could be found everywhere, ruling everything, including *people*. In fact, you might say I became a *student of human behavior*, so interested did I become, from an early age, in the orderliness—the consistency—of everyday life.

At first, I observed very *simple* things: Some people gave, others grasped. Some healed, others harmed. Some prayed, others cursed. Some smiled, others frowned. And so on.

Then, as I grew, I sensed a *greater pattern* in these observations. It wasn’t perfect, of course, but neither were my sight nor my insight. (I was only a boy!) But the pattern was strong. *Just* when it seemed to fade, it was *there* again—obvious, strong, *very* consistent.

And the pattern was this: Many happy people were alike. Many unhappy people were alike.

Happy people, for the most part, gave of themselves, healed others, and prayed. Their smiles were comforting. Happy people spread *joy* wherever they went.

Unhappy people, for the most part, grasped as much as they could for themselves, harmed others (sometimes intentionally, sometimes not), and cursed—both God and Man. Their frowns were discomforting. Unhappy people spread *pain* wherever they went.

As I matured, and read, and studied at school, I became confirmed in my belief that the pattern I observed was *real*, and *more: that it came from God*. I came to believe that the pattern I observed was born of *God's order*, an order that could be reduced to laws, just like the laws of physics.

And of course, the *laws* are Gods *commandments*, and the *pattern* is God's *justice*—a justice that waits not for death, a justice that requires no human intervention.

God's justice *happens*. It just *happens*. We can support it. We can *try* to avoid it. We can even try to thwart it. But God's justice *happens*. It just *happens*, as sure as night follows day.

You have heard it said: The commandments are rules you may choose to heed or not. Very true! But *I* say to you: *The commandments are laws that rule your life, whether you heed them or not.*

Listen to Sirach! The Lord is “all seeing.” And again: “He understands man's every deed.” And yet again: “To none does he give license to sin.” What is he telling us? God's justice *happens*. Even a little child, short of breath, can see this.

Heed Sirach! “If you choose, you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live; he has set before you fire and water; to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand.”

Choose wisely, I beg you.

Reading 1: Sirach 15:15-20

If you choose, you can keep the commandments, they will save you;
if you trust in God, you too shall live;
he has set before you fire and water;
to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand.
Before man are life and death, good and evil,
whichever he chooses shall be given him.
Immense is the wisdom of the Lord;
he is mighty in power, and all-seeing.
The eyes of God are on those who fear him;
he understands man's every deed.
No one does he command to act unjustly,
to none does he give license to sin.