

June 2, 2023



Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

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THE LEGACY OF THE GODLY

By Father David C. Robinson, SJ

An Excerpt from Today's First Reading

Now will I praise those godly men, our ancestors, each in his own time. Yet these also were godly men whose virtues have not been forgotten; Their wealth remains in their families, their heritage with their descendants; Through God's covenant with them their family endures, their posterity, for their sake. And for all time their progeny will endure, their glory will never be blotted out.

SIRACH 44:1, 10-13

Reflection

Throughout the annals of history, cultures and societies have created measures of human fame, worth, and persisting reputation. Some looked to personal strength, courage, and self-sacrificing heroism. Others looked to communal

leadership, abiding care for fellow citizens, and a creative vision of the future. Still others looked to individual achievement, genius that changed global perspectives, and prestige garnered through the gathering of financial or political influence. In the era of Ben Sira and the Jewish communities, the wisdom tradition that helped shape their scriptures, their religious identities, and their social mores was more concerned with the moral and ethical integrity of those who were held in the highest esteem as paragons of the culture. Those who ‘achieved’ lasting renown were persons of a virtue that moved them beyond common metrics of success or popular renown.

In contemporary conversation, those who dominate media and the press as cultural leaders or ‘influencers’ of government and geopolitical power are more apt than not to be praised for their capacity to sway opinion than for their moral character, honesty, or integrity in every aspect of their lives. A ‘multitude of sins’ can be easily overlooked if a short-term strategy can be achieved. Ben Sira would have been shocked at the facile way ‘success’ can supplant the common good. As he notes in his praise of the faithful: **Through God’s covenant with them their family endures, their posterity, for their sake.** In the interpretation of Mosaic law, as the sins of the fathers can stain the lives of their posterity to the fourth generation, so their virtue can position their descendants in the pantheon of the just for generations to come.

REFLECTION CONTINUES BELOW



Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap.

Stained glass window from Sacred Heart Chapel, Orange, CA
Photo by, and graphic created by, Fr. David C. Robinson, SJ

Reflection Continued

In our own communities and our nation we are currently being made keenly aware of the moral deficits that can mar our ethical center and our convictions as people of faith. Sirach is a stirring reminder that as God's family, we are ceaselessly urged and encouraged to affirm the spiritual and religious center of our identity as God's Chosen. Our legacy cannot reside in our 'successes' or 'achievements.' Our mandate for life is not to do 'great things,' but first and foremost to "Love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves." At the end, we do not bequeath a litany of actions whose focus is ultimately our own self-image. The inheritance we surrender to those who follow is the harvest of ethical, moral, compassionate, and self-giving efforts by which we forge our identity throughout life. Ben Sira exhorts each and all to cleave to the great wisdom that unites us with one another, and ever more fully with God's great vision for the world.

For Pondering

- Who are the formational figures in your life that provided a clear sense of your grounding values?
 - What teaching and wisdom do you espouse as the basis for your actions, day to day?
 - If someone asked you to express your inner sense of what God hopes for your future choices, how would you respond?
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