

Take-Home for Session 9: The Prayer of the Humble Pierces the Clouds

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- Worship funded by injustice is abomination: offering sacrifice from the property of the poor is like killing a son before his father's eyes, because the bread of the needy is their very life (34:18-22).
- Obedience and mercy are themselves liturgy: he who gives alms sacrifices a thank offering (35:1-2): our almsgiving thread ended at the altar, where it was always headed.
- God takes no bribes and shows no partiality, which is exactly why the wronged, the orphan, and the widow always have his ear: the prayer of the humble pierces the clouds (35:12-17).
- Jesus teaches the whole doctrine: be reconciled before you offer (Matthew 5:23-24), and the tax collector's seven words from the lowest place went home justified (Luke 18:9-14): the Mass forms these same dispositions in its penitential rite and exchange of peace, and Matthew's command may also require reconciliation before we ever arrive.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. John Damascene

The last of the Greek Fathers gave the Church her classic definition, enshrined in the Catechism: prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God, or the requesting of good things from God. Sirach's image gives the definition wings: what is raised in humility pierces the clouds.

On the Orthodox Faith (as cited in CCC 2559, paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyprian of Carthage

Commenting on the Lord's Prayer, Cyprian taught that God hears not the voice but the heart, and does not need to be reminded by our shouting: the quiet, humble, disciplined prayer, he taught, is the one with entry to God's ears: God hears the heart, not the voice.

On the Lord's Prayer, 4-6 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Thérèse of Lisieux

The Little Flower described prayer as a surge of the heart, a simple look turned toward heaven, a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy: words the Catechism placed at the head of its whole section on prayer. Her little way is Sirach 35:17 lived: nothing pierces higher than what rises from the lowest place.

Story of a Soul, manuscript C (as cited in CCC 2558, paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Before Sunday, do the Matthew 5:24 errand where possible and prudent: the apology, the text, the conversation you have been deferring. (Making peace with a neighbor does not replace Confession: anyone conscious of grave sin should seek the sacrament before Communion, CCC 1385.)
- Pray the tax collector's prayer (God, be merciful to me a sinner) ten times slowly each day this week, from the lowest interior place you can find.
- Arrive at Mass five minutes early and pray the Confiteor in advance, meaning every word, so the liturgy's front door does its work on you.

Scripture Memory Verse

"The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and he will not be consoled until it reaches the Lord." (**Sirach 35:17**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 38:1-23. Bring an honest opinion: how do faith, doctors, and medicine fit together?

Catechism References

CCC 2559; CCC 2558; CCC 2096-2097