

A

Season of

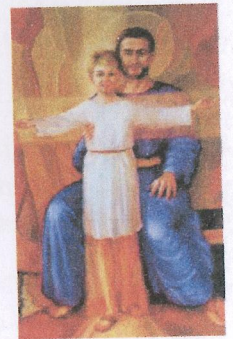
Parables

The physical, external life and the spiritual, inner life are not disconnected! Growth in both comes from making positive connections between various elements. As an example: in the physical life, once I make a connection between the facts that I feel tired, lethargic and bloated and that the reason for this is because my diet is not healthy enough and I don't take enough exercise, then I can begin to do something about the problem.

In the spiritual life, if neglect the things of the soul – giving adequate time to God, participating in the Eucharist, attempting to grow in prayer, then, though it may not be evident immediately, if I neglect these things of grace, then God becomes more and more remote, distant, irrelevant, until of course the worst happens and I really **need** the spiritual life but find I no longer have the inner resources that I once did.

The Father is not a cold calculating God of our lives; he is rather that loving parent [*as all the parents reading this column are and strive to be*], wanting the best for us, giving us lives to **live** and not just **exist in**; offering us himself, not least through other people who “companion” [*break bread*] with us in life, and above all assuring us, most powerfully in the living, dying and rising of Jesus – present here mysteriously in the liturgy, that we are loved eternally; that though there may be a tension between sin and grace in this life, in the next, grace triumphs gloriously, and that we will be our destiny.

The **Book of Ecclesiasticus** is a very ancient “wisdom” book, which found its way into the Old Testament scriptures. It says as much about human beings and human nature as it does about the things of God. It advises that if we want to know God's mercy then we should not exact vengeance from those who sin against us.



[Take time to read this Sunday's First Reading again: Ecclesiasticus 27:30 – 28:7]

As we all know from our experience - sin is grievous.

Sin is always wrong. It is always bad. It always hurts someone.

But the incredible news is - while sin always hurts - its power to hurt **ends** when forgiveness is applied to it. We **have been** forgiven by God. Sin no longer has the power to harm our relationship with God to the point of death, it has been washed away, it has been nailed to the cross, it has been buried, never to rise again, and in place of it, new life has come forth, a life that we have only to reach out for in prayer in order to receive.

That is what God does for us.

- Instead of punishing us for our sin,

- Instead of keeping us at arm's length,

- Instead of turning his face away from us as we may deserve, **God turns to us.**

God turns to us, and in pain, and in tears, and finally in death itself, he forgives us and calls us - and empowers us - to live as ones who are able, like Jesus, are able to bring the word of life to those who are in darkness, the word of love to those are just spiritually perishing on account of their lack of it.

As the scripture teaches, God doesn't condone our sin, nor does he compromise his standards. He doesn't ignore our rebellion, nor does he relax his demands. Rather than dismiss our sin, he assumes our sin and, incredibly, he sentences himself to death on Calvary to show his love. And so, we are redeemed. Christ's cross, experienced now in the present moment by our communion in the Mass is redemption.