

FEBRUARY 27, 2025 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

Today's readings are very much about right living, the first reading and, of course, our Gospel reading. And I always get a kick out of the reading, "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. If your feet cause you to stumble, cut it off. And if your eyes cause you to stumble, tear them out." I probably would be walking around lame by now and blind, if you read it literally. But it's not about literally reading these things. But it's about learning from our mistakes and to become that salt of life, the salt for other people and to be that light for others.

And salt, really, it's kind of uncommon language for us in our 21st century, but salt was very much in the ancient world-- in the ancient world, a sign of friendship and alliance, to be someone for others, to be a person of peace. And so, salt was actually used as a gift because we cannot live without salt, and as you know, it was very valuable in days past.

The first reading of Sirach, also Ecclesiasticus, we've been listening to it now for a few days and we will continue listening to it till Ash Wednesday, actually, and it's full of wisdom, it's full of wisdom. It was written in about 180 Before Christ, so about 180 years before Christ, by Ben Sirach, actually, in Jerusalem, and later translated in Greek, which is our version we have, in about 117 Before Christ, so a number of years later, by his grandson. And it's kind of a strange book. It's a book of wisdom, but there's no logic structure there. It has different themes woven through it, and it goes from one to the other. Although it doesn't have a logic structure, it's very much a good book to pray with, just to read a few lines and to let it absorb. I once spent an eight-day retreat on the book and I did not get through the book because it's so filled with so much goodness, so much wisdom, and it is about good living.

You don't have to be a believer to still have a good life. Even someone who does not really believe would get a lot of stuff out of it. And I will just go through a few items. So, in our first reading, it talks, "Rely not on your wealth," which is totally counter-cultural because our culture tells us that we should have plenty of wealth and that we would be safe. But rely not on your wealth, because wealth is just something, it can be taken away just, like that. The stock market can go down, some political upheaval, and there's nothing. And especially when you live in a war zone, like, say, the Gaza Strip or the Ukraine, a bomb, one bomb on your house and your wealth is gone.

Also, relying on wealth, there's no life in it because you can't take it with you. I'm dealing with a person I know quite well, who's really stuck in his wealth. He's dying, and so he cannot take it with him. But he keeps saying, "So, what will happen to my stuff? What will happen to my stuff?" And he has a lot of stuff besides, a healthy bank account. He has plenty of stuff, which he collected, actually, from big garbage sales. And I say to him, "Don't worry about it. A big bin will show up and people will throw it in," he is not able let go of his wealth. And it's obviously not an easy death and especially when we try to hang on to it.

Another one - I'm just taking another line, of forgiveness, "Be not overconfident adding sin upon sin." Yes, we have an all merciful God. God is merciful, but don't take it for granted to say, "Oh, yeah, well, I do this or that "and well, God will forgive me." It doesn't work like that. There has to be remorse. We have to learn from our sins, but not to take it for granted. And I think so many in our day are falling a little bit in that trap. We have of course, divine mercy, the ever-forgiving, loving Jesus, who will forgive. But if we take it for granted, I would say I would not bet on it because we don't know. We have to live clean lives

and learn from our mistakes, otherwise, things will not work out. It's as simple as that.

I'll just take another line. "Delay not your conversation to the Lord, "putting off day to day." And I hear this often also when I'm engaging with people: "Yeah, I should go back to church, "but you know, this and that," and from-- when we delay, never anything will happen. "Yes, I should pray and I will try to pray, "but maybe I'll start tomorrow." No, you got to start today because if you wait till tomorrow, tomorrow, you're gonna say, "Oh, yeah, well, I'll do it. "Today, something happened, "and I'll put it off till the next day" and on and on we go. And it can really be the work of the devil, which will-- which, of course, will try to keep us from building a relationship with God. And so, it's very much important not to let the devil get in there and deceive us. We have to have that relationship with God and so on. "Rely not on the strength-- on your strength "and following the desires of your heart". To think that I can have everything my heart desires and I'm strong, we see it also so often when someone is, say, in a power position, they think that they-- even with politicians, we see it, how fast politicians think they're on top, and next thing you know, they're at the bottom and they're out, or some scandal happens and they're out.

And so, today's readings are very much about living rightly, and it should cause us to really to ponder our own life journey with God, as we grow in God, and that, one day, we want to be united, fully united with God. Amen.