

*The Wisdom of Ben Sira* derives its title from the author, Yeshua [Jesus], son of Eleazar, son of Sira. This seems to be the earliest title of the book. The alternative title – *Ecclesiasticus* – came about through its regular usage in the Church's liturgy and teaching. It is now called "*Sirach*", the *Greek form of the author's name*.

Written in Hebrew in the early years of the second century B.C., the book was finished around 175. The text was finally translated into Greek by the author's grandson after 117 B.C.

By the end of the first century AD it was no longer included in the Jewish Bible and was therefore not adopted by the Protestant reformers.

It is Paul who sets out the mantra by which we need to be shaping our lives... *If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord*...nothing else is acceptable and nothing else will work.

But this is no easy teaching as he notes... *Overlook the faults of your neighbour rather than bearing a grudge, for this is enshrined in the law* (Lev 19:17-18; Ex 23:4-5).

He even says that this Father will not pardon our sins unless we first pardon those who offend us: "Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does a man harbor anger against another and yet seek for healing from the Lord? Does he have no mercy toward a man like himself and yet pray for his own sins?" (Sir. 28:24).

To refuse to forgive another is an act of rebellion against God, no how much we might seek to dress it

*He who fears the Lord will not be timid, nor play the coward, for God is his hope* (34:14)

The author of Sirach lived in Jerusalem and as a pious Jew his life and very being revolved around the Wisdom traditions, the Law, priesthood, temple and the worship of God. He grows in his life with God through engagement with what he would have understood as being the Bible (not as we know it today).

*Ben Sira's* goal was to show the Israelites who were living among sophisticated Greeks that their traditions were every bit as valuable as anything the pagan philosophers offered. They did not have to, indeed could not, turn their backs on the traditions of their elders with the hope of growing in popularity and acceptance.

*Force yourself, if necessary, always to forgive those who offend you, from the very first moment. For the greatest injury or offence that you can suffer from them is as nothing compared with what God has pardoned you*" (St. Josemaria)

Ben Sira warns the person bent on vengeance that *each of us participates in creating the world conditions in which we will live*. By omission or by commission we hold some responsibility for the state of the world we live in which we live. It is not all someone else's fault. One cannot both nourish anger and look for healing and forgiveness from God. Ben Sira seems in part to be saying, *look you lot, you can only receive what you are willing to give. So, be careful!*

With great insight he notes... *Remember your last days ... remember death and decay.*" A day is coming when all you can do is look back and ask yourself, *Did I make it worthwhile?* Thinking of that day, Ben Sira says set enmity aside *because you are building the reality you will face in your own final days.*

<sup>28:1</sup>*Those who are vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, because the Lord keeps strict count of their sins. <sup>2</sup>Forgive your neighbour a wrong, and then, when you pray, your sins will be forgiven.*

### Why is Gospel forgiving so difficult?

Because we human beings are sinful, forgiveness is not an easy task for any of us. We do not naturally want to let go of resentment, love those who have hurt us, or give them a chance to reconcile with us. forgiveness requires admitting God's control over our lives. We should not take revenge, because vengeance is the lord's (Deuteronomy 32:35). We should not

judge, because ultimately God will judge everyone (John 5:28-29).



**September 17th**

## THE NEW SHOFAR

**If we claim to be without sin,  
we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**

**If we confess our sins,  
he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all  
unrighteousness.**

***The only way to live faithfully under God is to imitate Jesus in all things.***

The point of today's Gospel of forgiving within the community of disciples is highlighted by Peter's question and Jesus' parable about the unforgiving servant. While Peter's mathematical approach *as-many-as-seven times* would seek to apply limits to forgiveness, Jesus' *seventy-seven times* implies that there is no limit to the community's exercise of forgiveness on behalf of rescuing or preserving its erring members. For a Christian, no sin by a brother or sister is so great that it cannot be forgiven. The members of this community are not to be human calculators, adding up the times they have already forgiven so that they can go back to holding grudges.

We should not be looking on this as a maths problem. The number seven in Jewish culture represented "perfection" or "completion." What Jesus is saying is that you should forgive the "complete" amount. In other words, we are to keep forgiving until there's no more to forgive or we die still forgiving.

### **At what point are we able to cease forgiving?**

Forgiveness isn't something we do once. It is *the way we live our lives*. For Jesus, no such point exists, leaving us with a calling that will bring us face to face with our own human limitations, and the blinding power the *Self* has over my living and acting. There is no statute of limitations on forgiving. We keep forgiving, keep forgiving that particular person of that same sin that has been annoying us for so long. At the bottom line is the guarantee from Jesus – God will only forgive us if we are first of all forgivers of others. All others. No exceptions. All sins. No exceptions.

### **Forgiveness evolves out of a deep relationship with Christ**

It is *in Christ* that God offers us forgiveness of a debt we could never ever pay – the debt of sin. However, when we refuse to forgive the "little offenses" others cause us, what we are doing is handcuffing God. Instead of placing ourselves under God's mercy, we end up being judged by the Law which is a much stricter understanding of justice. Previously, Christ pointed out, *For as you judge, so you will be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you* (Matthew 7:2). This is the way God has found to unfurl his mercy without compromising his justice; he leaves each person free to choose between the two. Judged by the letter of the Law or place ourselves into the merciful hands of God.

### **Do we wallow in our victimhood?**

But choosing to live under God in Christ is tough, a massive ask, a lifelong journey. It is hard for us to learn the ways of forgiveness in a world where revenge, payback hold sway. We tend to resent not only wilful offenses, but also innocent mistakes. We judge someone by a single incident, write them

off as being weird, odd, difficult or just not worth the time. We have special friends who allow us to ignore others and to manage carefully those allowed into our little group.