

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Paying Attention**      Eighth Week in Ordinary Time      Tuesday, February 28, 2017  
8:15 AM    **Sir 35:1-12;**    **Mk 10:28-31**    (The inner requirement that we all have every day is to pay attention to God. And that's what really prayer should be.)

We are reading today from the Book of Sirach. It is a book of wisdom, and it is a book that has also been very much influenced by the Torah tradition. Now basically there has been this question of: **what are we supposed to do?** God is God. God is good, and **God has offered us a covenant.** Now what are we supposed to do? **How are we supposed to respond?**

**There are three basic answers.** One is **we respond as a community through the rituals in the Temple.** Somehow the rituals of the Temple, which really are rooted in some sort of mystical experience of a heavenly temple, these somehow are a response of the whole community, and in some way satisfies what the human contribution is supposed to be. Well, this was very satisfactory to some people, but not others. Others came and said, well, **no we have to follow the Law, and not just the ten parts of the Decalogue, but all of the many, many laws and regulations and rules that are found in our tradition,** hundreds of which were written down, thousands of which were not until much later. That became a second approach. That was the approach primarily of the synagogue leaders, the rabbis, the scribes, most of whom belong to what was called the Pharisee party. The priests were mostly the Sadducee party, so they had different views of what we are supposed to do. Then comes the wise men, **the wisdom teachers, and they are the ones who wrote the Book of Sirach.**

Now all of these have something to say, but **they often miss the primary point.** The primary point of course was constantly emphasized by St. Paul and also St. John that everything is grace. **Everything is grace, and yet something is needed. There has to be some kind of response.** The response that is absolutely needed is **paying attention.** If we pay attention, then

**everything that we do can become a prayer**, then our ritual will speak of our own intentionality, our desire to praise God, to follow God. And we will experience being guided because God is always trying to guide us. **God wants to be part of our lives, but we have to pay attention.** That's what prayer is all about, paying attention. When we pay attention, then we know how to live out the Law. We see its point. **We understand the need for a just society and for just relationships, and we carry them out.** And we can do that because we are paying attention.

But the problem is **very often people try to do these things without paying attention, therefore without prayer. Ritual without prayer doesn't do any good. Law without prayer doesn't do any good.** Law without prayer is legalism. It turns our relation with God into a transaction. Ritual without prayer and attention becomes just a mechanical habit. It does not affect us. So we have to keep in mind that **the inner requirement that we all have every day is to pay attention to God. And that's what really prayer should be.** Even prayer could be turned into something merely ritual, mechanical, legalistic. But **true prayer is paying attention to the God who is inviting us to life**, who is inviting us into a banquet, who is inviting us to share our lives, who is bearing our lives with us and **carrying us through our travails our trials and, yes, death itself.** This is what Jesus shows in his life in everything he did and said, that God is always with us. And we need to be with him by paying attention.