

■ First Reading: Sirach 27:4-7

Just as pottery is strengthened in the kiln and its flaws become apparent, people are evaluated through conversation, revealing their true thoughts and weaknesses, which are usually hidden. Particularly, in times of trouble or during meals, a person's true nature is often revealed. As it is written, "A good tree bears good fruit," so a person with a good heart speaks good words, whereas a person with malice speaks foolish words (Matthew 7:16-20). When seeking to understand someone, it is important to listen carefully to their words first.

【About the Book of Sirach】

1. Period of Composition: Around the 2nd century BC, this book was compiled by Jesus ben Sirach, a Jewish scholar, and is named after him. At that time, due to the influence of Alexander the Great's conquests (4th century BC), he emphasized the importance of Israel's traditional wisdom (the teachings of the Law and the Prophets). His grandson later translated the book into Greek around 132 BC.

2. Main Themes

① Reverence for God. ② Justice and integrity. ③ Words and actions. ④ Roles of family, society, and leaders

Observance of the Law. ⑤ This book belongs to the category of wisdom literature, like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

3. Influence:

Although it is not part of the Hebrew Bible's canon, Jewish priests made use of it. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches consider it part of the Old Testament, while Protestants classify it as apocryphal (Deuterocanonical). The book has similarities with Japanese works such as The Analects and Caigentan and shares common wisdom with Japanese proverbs like "Words reflect a person's essence," akin to the saying, "A slip of the tongue can lead to disaster." Though rooted in Jewish tradition, its teachings are universally applicable and align with Japanese moral values.

● Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Paul proclaims victory over death through God's work Jesus' resurrection. Because Jesus triumphed over death, we no longer need to fear it.

At the time of Jesus' Second Coming, the "perishable body of this world" will be transformed into an "imperishable spiritual body," and death will be completely destroyed (Isaiah 25:8). As declared, "Death shall not have victory" (Hosea 13:14). Through the Law, we recognize sin and become aware of our transgressions (Romans 7:7-13). However, through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, we are freed from sin and granted eternal life a promise from God that will surely be fulfilled. Therefore, living according to God's will (His Word), proclaiming the Gospel (evangelization), and practicing love (the commandment of love) will never be in vain. Since we have received eternal life, we will be able to dwell with the Lord in the new Kingdom of God (Immanuel, Amen).

【On Aging and Death】

"Kadomatsu is like a milestone on the journey to the afterlife both a cause for celebration and a reminder of impermanence." Zen Master Ikkyu

New Year's celebrations bring joy, yet they also mark another step toward aging and death. Modern people seek comfort and pursue worldly desires, avoiding suffering. However, by preparing for the inevitable reality of aging and death, one can live happily both in this world and the next. (For details, see the supplement "Outline of the Book of Revelation" and "Present Life and Attainment of Happiness.")

● Gospel Reading: Luke 6:39-45

Jesus refers to the "blind leading the blind" as spiritually blind leaders (such as the scribes and Pharisees) who misguide others due to their lack of understanding of God's will. If such people lead, both the leader and the followers

will fall. A disciple learns and grows under a teacher. If the teacher spreads false teachings, the disciples will be influenced accordingly. However, if they learn from a righteous teacher, they will follow his example and do what he does (John 14:12). To discern whether a teacher is true or false:

- ① The Holy Spirit will guide you to truth (John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 2:12-14), so entrust yourself to the Spirit.
- ② Even teachings from authorities should be examined against the Word and Gospel (Galatians 1:8).
- ③ Look at the teacher's fruits their way of life and actions (Luke 6:43-45).

Before criticizing others, examine yourself and avoid judging others. "Karma (cause and effect) is inevitable:" Good deeds bear good fruit, and evil deeds bear bad fruit. "Even unfavorable outcomes can be turned to good (Divine Providence):" Even if things seem to go wrong, the Lord can use them for good (Romans 8:28).

The state of one's heart is reflected in words, actions, and prayers. Thus, the key lies in how one disciplines their heart.

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