

***Based on Sirach 35:12-17
Pentecost 20; Proper 25***

*Give to the Most High as he has given to you,
and as generously as you can afford.*

*For the Lord is the one who repays,
and he will repay you sevenfold.*

*Do not offer him a bribe, for he will not accept it
and do not rely on a dishonest sacrifice;*

*for the Lord is the judge,
and with him there is no partiality.*

*He will not show partiality to the poor;
but he will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged.*

*He will not ignore the supplication of the orphan,
or the widow when she pours out her complaint.*

Sirach 35:12-17

One of the themes that emerges from scripture, and which Jesus' teachings especially highlight, is the importance of having integrity in our relationships. The abundant life that Jesus speaks of and the Beloved Community he offers is built on our integrity, our willingness to live up to the commitments we make.

This is never more important than in the relationship we have with Jesus himself. The most important thing we can do if we truly desire to live the life of faith is to be completely honest about who we are before God. Now, it's not that God doesn't already know who you, what you're thinking, or what you've done; but rather that *you* are willing to admit as much to yourself and to God. We must know exactly where we are before we can begin the journey to true transformation in Christ.

In essence, this is what confession is really about; admitting and acknowledging your truest and deepest self to God. Because if we are to get anywhere in faith, first we must believe that we are truly beloved of God. When we can accept, without doubt, that we are loved, and that God's love can never be taken away from us, then we should feel no anxiety about revealing our innermost self to God.

In our way of faith, confession is an opportunity to lower our guard a bit in our relationship with God, allow ourselves a little vulnerability, and be perfectly honest about who we are. Not the person we aspire to be, or the one we try to convince others we are, but the for-real messy person we are when no one is looking.

Now let me say that by confession, I'm not necessarily speaking about the sacrament of confession where you go to a priest or pastor and tell her or him about your honest self and receive absolution. Mind you, I recommend that you try it, but instead, I'm speaking of the importance of telling God about your truest self and your perceived failings in your own personal prayers. The primary power of confessional prayer is that when you face up to and own your truest self you begin to have the power to change. You become empowered, through the Holy Spirit, to live differently because you can begin to see the patterns and motivators that lead you walk apart from Jesus. Honestly, at least with yourself, really is the best policy.

Here in this passage we are reminded that God values the sincerity of our prayers, and the earnestness of our faith. We are such fallible beings, forever falling short of our potential and God's hopes for us. And yet God has remained steadfast in God's love and offers us the hope of repentance and renewal through trust in the teachings and example of Jesus.