

### **Pastoral reflection: Johnny Zokovitch, Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> readings**

It's an odd statement that Sirach starts out with in today's first reading:

*The LORD is a God of justice,  
who knows no favorites.*

It's odd because everything that follows suggests that God DOES know favorites. God "hears the cry of the oppressed" and is "not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint." God hears the "one who serves God" and the "prayer of the lowly."

So I'm not sure why Sirach thinks God has no favorites.

The fullness of scripture bears this out too. God chooses the Israelite people, enslaved in Egypt, to be a people peculiarly God's own, and God liberates them from their oppressors, the Egyptians. The stories of the Hebrew scriptures have God intervening time and again on behalf of vulnerable peoples threatened by great empires and unprotected individuals bullied and assaulted by kings, judges and others who wield power.

God chose too to enter this world as one of the marginalized from a no-name town in an occupied country, rejecting—in such a choice—the path of riches and might and influence that being born to royalty would have brought; another tacit decision made to enter the fray on the side of those who identify as the dispossessed of history.

Indeed, the more we ponder Sirach's opening lines, the more we have to admit that what we actually have here is an oxymoron. Because to be a "God of justice" IS to "know favorites"; it is to stand with those denied dignity over against those who benefit from systems of greed, violence and injustice.