

Homily For the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year C

St. Peter's 9:30 11:30 AM Masses- November 3, 2019

Wisdom 11:22-12:2 "You overlook people's sins , so that they may repent."

Psalm 145 "All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you."

2 Thess 1:11-2:2 "We always pray for you that he will fulfil every good resolve and work of faith."

Luke 19:1-10 "Zacchaeus was trying to see Jesus, who said, Today salvation has come to this house."

The Tall and the Short of It

Luke

Back in those days, Zacchaeus was famous for being sort of a terrible person. Today, he is famous for being short. If he was not short, he would not have climbed up a tree. And, if he did not climb up a tree, he would not have seen Jesus. And also Jesus, would not have seen him. And if Jesus did not see him, he would not have invited himself to Zacchaeus' house for lunch. And, if Jesus had not done that, the people would not have grumbled and complained about how Zacchaeus was a very bad person. And then Zacchaeus would not have given half his money to the poor and returned four times the amount of money he stole from people. But, the most important thing that would not have happened if Zacchaeus had not climbed that tree ... he would not have received the greatest gift God can give, which is Jesus coming into his heart, the salvation of his eternal soul.

Well, we could conclude that God loves most of all those people who are rich and not very tall people. But that's not the point, is it? Today, we need to look a little deeper at what is going on. This is not like a story about Harry Potter or Luke Skywalker or Dumbledore. It's a story that the Gospel writer, Luke, checked out the facts about something that happened while Jesus was just passing through Jericho and met a man named Zacchaeus.

Luke devotes the whole tone of his Gospel toward embracing the poor and lowly. But this time he includes this passage about the salvation of a rich and powerful

man. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and rich. That means he had power and money. That's a successful life, isn't it? Zacchaeus was at the top of the pyramid scheme that was the Roman taxation system.

Yet, for some reason, he must have been thinking about his own life and his unhappiness. Has there ever been a time in your life when you wondered if there might be something more to this life that we are just passing through? Have you ever wondered if financial security and having nice things around you, or even being liked by other people, might not be enough for true happiness? I certainly have. And, at those times, I am more like Zacchaeus than I want to admit. At those times I have considered whether Jesus Christ might be the answer to my questions?

Zacchaeus must have heard about Jesus. How else can we explain how interested he was in seeing him? Something must have been working in him for some time. This could not have been a sudden desire for something that he did not have. It would not have been to his advantage to follow a wandering teacher or miracle worker. And yet, that day he wanted more than anything to see Jesus. I don't think he knew he was going to give away a lot of his money, but that day he was willing to look foolish in front of all the people he knew.

Why would anyone come to a point in his or her life that he would give up everything to hear Jesus say, "Today salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost?"

Lessons

A few lessons suggest themselves from the readings today?

First is that all the people were right about Zacchaeus. He was definitely a sinner. But they were very wrong about something else. They were all sinners. They wouldn't like to hear it but the only really important difference between the rest of the people and Zacchaeus is that he knew he was a sinner in need of saving and

they did not. That is why only he was able to hear Jesus' desire to come into his home.

The next lesson is that, in order to receive that salvation and the full happiness that God has in store is to be seeking Jesus. Only those who are seeking him will find him. Only those who know they are lost can be found. It's a basic principle. And the amazing thing is that, when we finally begin to seek in earnest, we will realize that he has been seeking us all along. When we see him, we will notice that he sees us and has been looking at us with love all along.

A significant moment for me happened when I was driving my wife and two young children, at the time, to a home out in the country beyond Cochrane. I got absolutely lost on gravel roads with no signs of where to turn. I began to be afraid for my family. To top it off, for some reason I couldn't see the ditch on the side of the road and was in danger of driving into it. After I prayed for help, something suggested to my mind to stop the car, get out and see if my headlights were working. It turned out they were covered in dust, making them almost useless. When I cleaned off the lenses and got back in, everything looked different. I could see. Not long later, the lights of a house were visible and it turned out that is exactly where we were going. I have never forgotten that day when, in my own sense of powerlessness, I turned my situation over to Jesus.

Wisdom

The book of Wisdom tells us that the whole world is like a speck to God. It's like a drop of morning dew. It's very small. It's like Zacchaeus. And yet that world, that drop of morning dew has almost unimaginable beauty. Someone said that every single poet who ever lived has, at some point, written about the morning dew. Soon we will hear the priest say, at the moment of bread and wine being transformed into God's gift to us, the Real body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus, "Let your Spirit come upon these gifts like the dewfall." It's an image of great beauty which will be used to indicate the awesome beauty of Jesus Christ becoming fully present to us right here today.

But we all have to become Zacchaeus, to climb up a tree so we can see it. We have to be seeking God to realize what the writer of Wisdom says: "You are merciful to all, and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent." God makes a kind of space for us so we can see that the path we are on is a dangerous one that leads away from him. It won't happen all at once. Even Zacchaeus must have been thinking about it for awhile. Listen again to Wisdom: "You correct little by little those who trespass and you remind and warn them of the things through which they sin, so that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord."

Call To Action

Our experience can never match the salvation that God wants to give us. We can be short or tall, poor or rich. No one is outside of that love. Jesus wants to have supper with us in our house. Even more he wants to come into the centre of our being and feed our hearts.

Everyone is Zacchaeus. We can't see the truth on our own. We have to get high enough to see it. And after making the effort, we will be ready to see him. And he will see us. Actually he always sees us, but when we start to seek him, we notice that he sees us. I have to stay at your house. In the gospels this means your heart. Jesus is asking for permission to come right in to where you live, not your living room to watch TV and drink beer, but right into the centre of your existences.

Don't be frightened by the idea of having to give away so much. Zacchaeus had spent his whole life gathering all he could, cheating people, being hated. But, when he received the blessing of Jesus wanting to come to him, it was his joy to give it away. We will never be asked to give away what we want to keep for ourselves. Do you see that this is how God works? People misunderstand God. He doesn't want what we are afraid to give him. He only wants what we are happy to give him. God doesn't need anything we have, so we can't buy his love.

When you see Jesus, you will know who he is, but only if you are seeking him. All who seek him will find him. No one who doesn't seek him will find him. If you seek him but haven't found him yet, keep at it. ALL who seek eventually find him.