

Homily for the 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

Wisdom of Solomon 11:22–12:2 Psalm 145:1–2, 8–11, 13, 14

2 Thessalonians 1:11–2:2 Luke 19:1–10

***God loves us into goodness***

Today's Old Testament and Gospel readings present to us a beautiful theological principle called "The Principle of Predilection" The "Principle of Predilection" can be explained this way.

***God does not love us because we do good; we do good because God loves us.***

To put it even more simply:

***God loves us into goodness.***

We see this Principle of Predilection clearly expressed in the beautiful reading from the Book of Wisdom. Let's listen to it again:

***<sup>22</sup>Because the whole world before you is like a speck that tips the scales,  
and like a drop of morning dew that falls on the ground.***

Isn't that a remarkable poetic statement? In comparison to God, the whole world is like a crumb or speck on a scale or like a single drop of dew on a summer's morning. So seemingly insignificant, something we as humans would miss, is of infinite importance to God. So much so that:

***<sup>24</sup> you love all things that exist,  
and detest none of the things that you have made,  
for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.***

Here is language that speaks to us with such clarity about God's extravagant care for this world. If God detested the world he would not have made it because God does not need the world. However it is out of his generous self-giving love that he has made all things. So when we hear a bird song, celebrate the beauty of a dew dappled lawn as the sun catches the droplets of water on a July morning, or wonder at a snow covered mountain on a beautiful winter day, these are expressions of the Principle of Predilection. The love of God causes everything to be good because:

***God loves all things into goodness.***

Listen now to how the Principle of Predilection moves from the more general reflection on all things loved into goodness to a concentration on God loving us, his human creatures, into goodness.

***<sup>23</sup>But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things,  
and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent.***

**12** *For your immortal spirit is in all things.  
<sup>2</sup>Therefore 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.*

Here are words echoed also in the Psalm appointed for today:

**<sup>8</sup>The Lord is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
<sup>9</sup>The Lord is good to all,  
and his compassion is over all that he has made.**

Have you ever heard the heretical statement that the Old Testament God is angry and the New Testament God is loving? This lie goes back to a second-century heretic named Marcion. Nothing could be further from the truth. No language the New Testament surpasses this language depicting God loving us into goodness. These verses want us to grasp that the essence of God is his mercy. God does not treat us as our sins deserve but He's patient with us so that in repenting we would be freed from wickedness and put our trust in God.

Why is God so dedicated to his merciful love? Because his immortal spirit is in all things. God wants us to discover the freedom that he desires for us when we recognize that because God loves us we can change for the better.

Again listen to the text of Wisdom:

**<sup>25</sup>How would anything have endured if you had not willed it?  
Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved?  
<sup>26</sup>You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.**

Look at your lives, look around at one another. We are here because God wills our being and desires that we would thrive because we are his. He wants to love you, and you, and you into goodness. He wants to love us into goodness.

Jesus speaks about this Principle of Predilection in today's Gospel when in explaining why he went to the home of Zacchaeus he concludes:

***"Today salvation has come to this house because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."***

Salvation that allowed this man, who had been a notorious chief tax collector, to have Jesus come into his home. This is something Jesus wants to do in the life of all people. This is what Jesus wants to do in your life, in my life and the lives of those who do not know him. He so wants to come home with us so we can be corrected little by little of our sins and know more profoundly what it means to be loved into goodness.

Yes, loved into goodness is what happened to Zacchaeus.

***“Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”***

Loved into goodness is what St. Paul describes when in 2 Thessalonians he explains the reason for his prayer:

***<sup>11</sup> To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, <sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

What does the Principle of Predilection state?

***God does not love us because we do good; we do good because God loves us.***

Or to put it in Paul’s language, that the name of Jesus may be glorified in us as his name was glorified in the life of Zacchaeus.

I want to end with an example of the Principle of Predilection taken from literature.

***A Tale of Two Cities*** is a wonderful story Charles Dickens. Set during the time of the French Revolution, there is one character that stands out for me. Sydney Carton is his name. Here is a man who is loved into goodness.

At the novel’s outset he describes himself thus:

***“I am a disappointed drudge, sir. I care for no man on earth, and no man on earth cares for me.”***

This is reminiscent of another Dickens character, Ebenezer Scrooge, with his Bah Humbug philosophy of life. But Scrooge changes and so does Carton. What is the catalyst for this change? A woman...Lucie Manette. This young woman is noble, humble, and pure. Sydney observes the way in which Lucie Manette lives her life and is moved to the point of uttering,

***“You have been the last dream of my soul...let me carry through the rest of my misdirected life, the remembrance that I opened my heart to you”***

He then promises that he would be,

***“a man who would give his life to keep a life you love beside you.”***

This is something that Sydney will do. He will give his life in exchange for the life of Lucie’s husband Charles Darnay, a man whom Sydney Carton resembles in appearance. Charles Darnay, a French aristocrat, who is kind and generous, is accused of crimes against the new Republic

and is sentenced to death. In a complicated plot twist, Sydney is able to exchange places with Charles in the Bastille.

Sydney Carton is now awaiting the end of his life. He meets and quickly befriends a young girl who is also awaiting death. The girl discovers that Carton has sacrificed his life for another and is moved. Carton becomes a rock of stability for her in these final minutes.

**“I think you were sent to me by Heaven”**

she utters. Carton reassuringly responds,

**And you to me. “They will be rapid. Fear not!”**

Soon after the young woman meets her death and Dickens then prolongs Carton’s end, with the brave man reciting these words from John 11:

***“I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”***

Then there is this observation that Dickens, the commentator writes in the third person:

***They said of him, about the city that night, that it was the peacefullest man’s face ever beheld there. Many added that he looked sublime and prophetic.***

From a disappointed drudge to a man of deep serenity.

And then a couple of paragraphs later

The novel closes with one of literature’s great lines:

***“It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.”***

What had Sydney Carton discovered thus allowing him to go to his death with these words in his lips? The merciful love of God, shown to him first in Lucy Manette so that God could get hold of his heart. Correcting him little by little he was freed from his wickedness and put his trust in God as he entered into that far, far better rest.

May we this week keep in mind this beautiful theological principle of predilection and open our souls and lives to be daily loved into goodness and with today’s psalmist sing:

***The Lord is faithful in all his words,  
and gracious in all his deeds.***