

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 30, 2022

Lectionary Readings:

Wisdom 11:22 - 12:2

Thessalonians 1:11 - 2:2

Luke 19:1-10

The Lord is full of mercy and compassion.

Work; do not wonder about the end.

He has come to save the lost.

Luke:

Luke's community most likely experienced a sense of isolation from the larger Christian community. They were largely of Gentile origin, trying to gain acceptance in a milieu where Jewishness still predominated. They needed to hear that *outsiders* had been sought out by Jesus for inclusion in his community of disciples. These early Christians had to learn that they themselves had to be open to others who were not necessarily like them. Were the rich also called to God's kingdom? How about those who did business with the Roman authorities?

The story of the call of Zacchaeus was told them for their instruction. Only Luke tells this story from the life of Jesus. Luke has this inclination always to highlight the special concern that Jesus had for those who were excluded, those who were alienated, those who were marginalized. The poor hear the good news of salvation first; women furnish images of who God is; tax collectors and sinners find a place at table with Jesus as a sign of the heavenly banquet yet to come.

Zacchaeus was one of the chief customs collectors in the crossroads town of Jericho. He was a Jew, of course. But he had become a collaborator of the hated Romans. He extorted money from his fellow Jews and turned it over to the enemy. He often cheated his people. If anyone was in need of salvation, it was Zacchaeus.

He has a hunger in his heart; he knows he is a sinner; he *must* see this celebrity rabbi from the north. He runs. He climbs a tree. If only he can see him, maybe he will find some measure of peace. Who cares what people will say now? They've said everything they can say already. Condemnations don't hurt any more.

There he is! He is passing close by! But, he is stopping! He looks up! His eyes are searching for this man up in the tree. Jesus' yearning for the soul of this man carries all the way up the tree! "Come down, Zacchaeus! Come down and take me home with you! Let me come into the very depth of your heart and all will be well for you."

Zacchaeus goes berserk! He promises to do twice as much as the law requires when someone has cheated in business. His response to Jesus is overwhelmingly enthusiastic. How can he contain himself when the prophet of God has been so overwhelmingly good to him? He is promised forgiveness and salvation. He is willing to do everything to show his gratitude.

Zacchaeus is a wealthy man. Jesus has come to his house, too, with salvation. The Gentiles who lived in relative comfort in the Roman Empire heard this story. So, salvation is not only for the poor! Jesus is willing to come to their homes, too, perhaps! This Jesus is a lot more inclusive than we had thought him to be.

Wisdom:

It has been said that the most creative thing God can do with sin is to forgive it! What else can one do with sin, rebellion, rejection, opposition? Crush it? Smother it? Obliterate it? Wipe it out, along with the sinner? What value comes from that? God is always Creator. So, God creates a new opportunity, a new way of being, new life when God forgives. Forgiveness leads to life; anything else leads to death. God knows how to deal gently with the sinner so that the sinner may arise from sin and find the way to a new way of living. The author of Wisdom tells us about the gentle mercy and compassion of God toward those who have sinned.

Thessalonians:

The very first New Testament writings come to us from the pen of Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles: 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Paul had only spent a short time in Thessalonika (Acts 17:1-10). In the first letter, he commends them for their faithfulness. In the second letter, he writes to correct some misinterpretation of his teaching about the second coming. Some are saying the “Day of the Lord” has already come, so they are urging relaxation of vigilance. Paul says the day is still to come. But people must not be alarmed; they must not interrupt the works that still need to be accomplished.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever felt that Jesus was looking for you in the crowd of Christians that gathers to celebrate the Eucharist? His gaze searches the room. He looks into everybody’s soul, but he does not see you yet. Did you just come to see and not be seen? Did you think the branches of the tree (or the anonymity of the crowd) would cover you? Another parishioner catches sight of you! “How nice to see you! Have you been sick? We missed you.” Jesus has just found you! How are you going to respond?
2. Can you imagine what it must be like to live like Zacchaeus? With lots of money but with no friends? Excommunicated from your religious fellowship? Considered “unclean” even by members of your family? Do you know people who have separated themselves from the love and care of everyone, even of their families, in order to pursue a lifestyle or an occupation that is totally unacceptable? Would you invite yourself to the home of such a person?
3. What is your response to Jesus Christ when he comes to you in holy Communion? Do you have anything to say about correcting your weaknesses and abandoning some sinful practice? Do you suppose that Jesus has come to you for the very reason that you are in such dire straits, that you need him so very much? What are you willing to give up today so that Jesus will stay with you?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Select some place in your heart, above the ordinary business and crowdedness of your every day (climbing a tree, so to speak), and keep watching for Jesus to come by. Be patient; He will come; He will look for you and call out to you.

PRAYER

**God, grant me
Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can, and
Wisdom to know the difference.**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The Christian Church is firmly committed to the belief that Christ will return to earth at the end of time to judge the living and the dead and to present to the Father a kingdom of peace and of love. The Church awaits the coming of Christ with sincere hope. He has promised it, and he will be faithful to his promise.

Judgment day will come for all creation. The faithful will be given their final and definitive reward to be with God forever in the glory of the kingdom. Those who have done evil without repenting of it will be condemned to everlasting separation from God to the anguish of punishment forever. Jesus Christ will judge the world on his Father's behalf. To him has been assigned all power and all right to decide, to reward, and to hand over to punishment.

The Church has long awaited the second coming. Having heard the promise from the lips of the Lord himself: "I leave you now ... I will return." The promise of the angels after his ascension: "He will come back in the same way you have seen him go."

As Church, we always live in the hope that the coming will be realized in our lifetime. No one knows the exact time; only the Father in heaven. We look forward to the completion of the Lord's mission on earth when all things will have been transformed into glory by the grace of God. With eagerness, we await his return.

The Church must still go through a period of trial and of purification before the Lord will come. There is a cleaning that will take place, is taking place even now. Then, the Lord will come to present his Bride to the Father.

According to the Letter to the Romans (11:20-26), the Chosen People of Israel have, in some measure, failed to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. The plan of the Father still awaits fulfillment as long as this People of the Promise hesitate to recognize the work of God in Christ. In some way, we still look forward to the inclusion of the Jewish people, along with all the Gentiles, in the salvation brought by the Messiah (Ephesians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 15:28).

See **The Catechism: # 668-677.**