HOMILY FOR THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME- YR C

DATE: November 3, 2019

READINGS: First - WIS 11: 22 - 12:2; Psalm: 145: 1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14; Second - 2 THES 1:11 - 2:2; Gospel - LK 19:1 - 10

Today’s first reading sums up so well Israel’s insights into just what God was like. This book of Wisdom reminds us of the mercy of God which extends to all his creatures irrespective of their status: “Yet, you are merciful to all because you can do all things and overlook men’s sins so that they can repent.” As a father who would not despise his own child, God will not despise his people because He values each one of us. Wisdom speaks of eternal life and accentuates God’s loving patience and it introduces a new title for God: “Lover of souls.” “You love all that exists… You spare all things because all things are yours, Lord, lover of souls”.

 The Responsorial Psalm affirmed much the same thing. God “is kind and full of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in love, compassionate to all creatures”. It is beautiful. But it was hard for the people to learn, just as it is hard for us and was so for Zacchaeus at that time.

Because of his occupation Zacchaeus, was considered by his own people, the Jews, as an outcast, a traitor, and a collaborator with the Roman invaders. Banned from the temple, the little man of shameless wealth was pushing his way through the unwelcoming crowd. He humbled himself by climbing the sycamore tree. Jesus looked up into the sycamore tree and called Zacchaeus, “Hurry on down!” — for he knew the man was ready for a change of heart.

St Luke adds that the conversion of Zacchaeus brought such joy not only to himself but to everyone around him. Jesus’ purpose in life was always “to seek out and save what was lost.” He could have pointed up at Zacchaeus and confronted his self-centered greed and dishonesty, his exploitation of his own people.  Instead, Jesus said, “Let’s do lunch.” A lot of things happened rapidly when Jesus invited himself to eat with Zacchaeus.

If we recognize a certain lostness in ourselves, our way to be saved is to trust in him, and let Jesus find us, just as he found Zacchaeus. Being found by Jesus meant that Zacchaeus the tax-collector had to let go of any arrogance based on his wealth.

The Jews were astonished at Jesus eating with a sinner. His disciples may have tried to disappear, not knowing what to say after Jesus’ latest surprise. Jesus accepted Zacchaeus just as he was.

This was precisely what Zacchaeus needed: acceptance from an obviously good person in spite of his sins. He was amazingly moved, promising to give half his fortune to the poor and make quadruple amends for what he had taken unjustly. It was the power of Jesus’ acceptance that could work that miracle of conversion. Zacchaeus means pure or righteous. He began to live up to his name that day.

In the second reading, St Paul prays for us to persevere in good deed and faith in Christ. He equally encourages us to continue without being carried away by false rumors of the Lord’s imminent coming. If we make frantic efforts as Zacchaeus did, Christ will certainly notice us and show us his loving mercy as He comes our way.

Humility helps us to accept who we are. However, it does not prevent us from trying to overcome our shortcomings. Instead, it should spur us to search good paths to success in life. Zacchaeus’ humility and effort to see and encounter Christ is worth emulating.

Today’s story of Zacchaeus is just the right story for us as we move towards the conclusion of our liturgical year. In so many ways, it suits our situation perfectly.

There was Zacchaeus wanting to see Jesus. That’s us – as we gather today for the Eucharist: “O dear Lord, three things I pray: to see thee more clearly; to love thee more dearly; to follow thee more nearly, day by day.” Jesus said to Zacchaeus: “Today salvation has come to this house since he also is a son of Abraham. More importantly, Jesus wants to be with us: I must stay at your house today. This is the wonderful freedom of Jesus: to be seen with us and to stay with us.

I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.