

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time – 30 Oct 2022

Reading 1 Wis 11:22-12:2

Responsorial Psalm Ps 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14

Reading 2 2 Thes 1:11-2:2

Gospel Lk 19:1-10

Brothers and Sisters,

In the last few weeks, we have heard a lot of parables that try to describe how we should act according to Jesus. I believe, far too often, that we fail to reflect on the Gospel as a whole – we see each Sunday as a stand-alone occasion.

Today's Gospel shows us that Jesus did not merely speak about things he wants us to do, he acted that way in his life also. Jesus was not one of those who talked, but he also walked the walk.

In today's world, too often we are simply cultural Catholics – these are people who say that for them personally, being Catholic is mainly a matter of ancestry and/or culture rather than religion, according to a PEW study done in 2015.

Still, majorities of cultural Catholics also point to religious beliefs and teachings as key parts of their Catholic identity.

About 60% of cultural Catholics say that having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is essential to what being Catholic means to them. Likewise, 57% say the same about believing in Jesus' resurrection.

A similar share of these cultural Catholics (59%) says that working to help the poor and needy is essential to their Catholicism.

Meanwhile, sizable minorities of cultural Catholics also participate in some of the church's rituals.

For instance, about a third of cultural Catholics (32%) say they attend Mass at least once a year, and roughly a quarter (26%) say they receive Holy Communion at least sometimes when they attend Mass.

A third (33%) say they gave something up or did something extra for Lent this year, and about four-in-ten (41%) say it would be important to them to receive the sacrament of the anointing of the sick (sometimes part of "last rites") if they were seriously ill.

Some of these cultural Catholics may in the future even return to Catholicism – 43% of cultural Catholics who were raised Catholic say they could see themselves returning to the church someday, while only 8% of ex-Catholics say the same.

Yet, in the post-Christian world, as Bishop Daniel Jenky stated, we live in days that require heroic Catholicism, not casual or cultural Catholicism.

We can no longer be Catholic by accident of birth or social culture – instead we must be Catholics by conviction – this requires that we have an unshakable belief in Jesus Christ without need for proof or evidence.

That is one of the greatest challenges in the post-modern/post-Christian world – we want evidence that something is real, or at least some scientist to tell us what real is.

Can you measure charity – some think you can by simply asking how much money do you give? Some measure love by how much you do or give them?

In a world driven by rewards – how much did you get back for that charitable donation? What are you expecting in return for doing what you did?

Those who simply see God as a Judge expect him to just weigh the evidence of our action, as if our actions are the only thing that God is looking at.

Is someone stealing bread to feed their children – really a thief or did we overlook our neighbor's needs – a lack of charity on our part.

If the black sheep of the family was trying to escape from being murdered, would you simply bar the door to keep from being bothered?

Mercy without justice leads to disunion; Justice without mercy leads to cruelty.

Knowledge of what Jesus is asking us to do is of no value unless we put it into practice.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is doing exactly that, putting into practice what he has spoken about. Zacchaeus is wondering who this Jesus is – he has never seen him. Yet, something is driving him to see Jesus.

Zacchaeus, a tax collector, has been using his position for his enrichment, just as the dishonest steward in the parable we heard a few weeks ago. He is hated and despised by his own people, one for working for the Romans and another for stealing from his own people.

The mentioning that Zacchaeus is a short man is not an accident either – he would be a person easily overlooked in life. That he is the chief tax collector means he is someone that can't be overlooked.

Zacchaeus knew the Ten Commandments given to Moses, especially the Seventh commandment “Thou shall not steal.” and the Eighth Commandment “Thou shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Yet to accumulate his power and wealth, he routinely had to violate those two commandments, along with those regarding the poor and unfortunate and business practices found in the 613 Commandments derived from the Torah.

Like the tax collector in the Parable we heard last week, he knows he is a sinner. I believe that he has heard that Jesus forgives sinners, but also requires that they must freely admit that they have sinned and be willing to repent and make restitution for those sins.

For a man like Zacchaeus, he is being called to give up the sins of pride, avarice and greed that have led him to his place of honor. Like Scrooge, in Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol", he understands that desire to change must be followed by action.

Simply professing that one wants to change is not enough. It must be followed by action. For God does not judge our feelings; he judges our actions.

Zacchaeus knows this – and that is why he is telling Jesus what he is going to do for penance. He has developed a personal relationship with Jesus and wants to restore his relationship with his fellow Jews, especially those that he has violated.

Which Zacchaeus are we today – the Chief Tax Collector or the one who wants a personal relationship with Jesus and lives that reflect that in our daily actions.

As we approach the altar to receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, let us ask for the grace we need to be Christian by conviction and for the strength and courage needed to live a life that glorifies our Lord.

Amen!