

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

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

Alleluia - Jn 3:16

Gospel - Lk 19:1-10

Deacon Andrew Krug - Homily

How do you see Jesus? Some see him as a great teacher or philosopher. Some see him as someone who can cure their ills or fulfill their needs. Some see him as a great miracle worker. Some see him as one who can make everything better for us and make us feel better about ourselves. Some see him as the son of God. How do you **see** Jesus?

We don't really know too much about Zacchaeus and his relationship with Jesus other than this Gospel account, but we know that he also wanted to see Jesus. Why? What was Jesus to Zacchaeus? Was he a magician who could produce a miracle and he might see it? Was he a popular local celebrity who he might get to know? Was he the answer to his prayers? We don't know why. We do know that Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in the Jericho region, a well-known person for certain reasons, as we have read about this type of person in other Gospel accounts. Tax collectors were not generally known as innocent or pure. Most were known as self-serving men who cheated the people for anything they could skim off the top as they collected taxes for Rome. Zacchaeus had a bad reputation. He was the target of gossip among the people. So, I'm certain the people were taken aback when Jesus announced that he was coming to Zacchaeus' house to dine. The people murmured, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But, I wonder, was Zacchaeus really a bad person, or perceived as a bad person by others since he was a tax collector? Maybe he wasn't. We see that everywhere today. People's false assumptions of others. Incapable of being anything other than what others think and speak. Incapable of doing the right thing.

Did you know that in Greek, "Zacchaeus" means "pure" or "innocent"? As Jesus says in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God". And how does Zacchaeus see God? Zacchaeus sees God by climbing a sycamore tree. A man searching for Jesus. And Jesus finds Zacchaeus and asks to enter his house, "Come down quickly" Jesus says. We get a sense of urgency in this. Not "I'll see you down the road, next week or so..." but quickly. Don't wait. Time is of the essence. Your time with me is now.

We read of a heartfelt "confession" of sorts by Zacchaeus once Jesus enters his house. With joy in receiving Jesus, Zacchaeus states, "half of my possessions, Lord, I **shall** give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I **shall** repay it four times over." Not, "I have", but "I shall". The wonderful revealing's of a man's changed heart. There's a dichotomy in this story. A changing or opposing of sides. Pure, impure. Sinner, forgiven.

Have you ever met a person that you know was so good they changed your life? You know that person that just makes you want to impress, to be near and absorb their goodness? You feel like a better

person for just knowing them? *Husbands, please shake your heads "yes" and look at your wives right now!* In today's Gospel, Zacchaeus met such a person. The person called Jesus. Jesus touched the hearts of many sinners and evil people, healing and forgiving. Many sinners repented from the presence of Jesus. Jesus helped those who felt helpless, alone. Jesus took people that others may have said were a bad person and suddenly they are purified and ready to begin anew in Christ. What a free feeling that must have been. Wouldn't it have been awesome to witness such gifts of grace?

We too have that very same chance to receive His grace in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus forgave even those who betrayed Him. Christ forgives all our sins if we go to see him through humility and repentance in the sacrament. Zacchaeus may have thought himself unworthy as well. His "shortcomings" made him not see the Lord, but something forced him to want to go and see Him, to confess to him. So, he climbed a sycamore tree to see the Lord didn't he? Why mention a sycamore tree? As a sycamore tree grows, the pure white underbelly shows out between the dark rough exterior of the bark. Much like our souls as we confess our sins to God. As we are forgiven, our pureness, our cleanliness of our souls begins to grow and shadow the rough exterior of our sinful past. Confession purifies our souls, and we see God. Like Zacchaeus. We are as worthy as Zacchaeus was worthy. We should make every effort to see Him.

In today's Gospel, a man sought to see the Lord. Jesus asked Zacchaeus to come to his house. Jesus is asking to come into our "house", our soul, through the sacrament of Confession. Don't wait. Time is of the essence. Your time with Him is now. Will you welcome him like Zacchaeus with joy, humility, and obedience?