

Holy Scripture has a way of resonating with us, a way of helping us in good times and in bad. It is a moral compass and a map on the road to Salvation. There are practical applications for us to accept or deny, live or forsake and in its heroes and villains we are able to see ourselves. You and I are the intended audience, we are the receivers of this gift....we are implied.....but we are not its subject.

The Bible is not ABOUT me or ABOUT you, but it is ABOUT God.....Who He is and what He does!

Today's first reading from the Book of Wisdom is one of the most beautiful descriptions of God, His love and patience for us and His desire for us.

I'm going to read it again.

Not because it wasn't well proclaimed the first time for it was. But I want to read it as poetry, as an Ode to a God so immense and as an Anthem of His love, and His Mercy. Try to listen to it as if you have never heard it before:

Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.

***But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things;
and you overlook people's sins that they may repent.***

***For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made;
for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.***

***And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it;
or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?***

***But you spare all things, because they are yours,
O LORD and lover of souls, for your imperishable spirit is in all things!***

Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little, warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing, that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD!

Beautiful.....isn't it?

But the trouble with poetry is that it can be a bit lofty and seem too magnificent to be real or easily believed. It has language that we don't use every day and phrasing that is not a part of our style of common communication.

So what does God DO to communicate with us? He puts these words, these descriptions, this tremendous LOVE into **action**. Actions, we are told, speak louder than words.

Jesus Christ IS that action.... and His actions in today's Gospel speak volumes to us.

Every word that is spoken, every movement, every interaction in this Gospel, at its deepest levels, say to us "I AM LOVE AND MERCY and I LOVE YOU". One could spend decades with this single Gospel event, and not exhaust its meanings.

But I don't have decades to reflect on it today, so I will try to distill it down to the next few minutes.

I want to focus on the dialogue between Jesus and Zacchaeus.

The Gospel says of Jesus: When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house."

What happened?

First, and this is easy to miss, Jesus looked at Zacchaeus. I do not think it was a simple glance up the tree, but rather Jesus GAZED at him. He fixed him in His line of sight and Jesus SAW him.

The one who is pierced for all sin, pierced the heart of Zacchaeus and he knew him. He knew his sinfulness, he knew his past. And in His Holy eyes, Zacchaeus saw God in the context of our first reading. He saw and felt His love and mercy. Grace had entered him and filled him to the marrow.

And then, then Jesus called Zacchaeus, by name. My friends, in Scripture names matter. Jesus means "God Saves". Very telling of the action and purpose of His Life, Death and Resurrection.

But what about Zacchaeus?

The name of this wealthy and obscenely corrupt man who climbed that sycamore tree means, in Aramaic, pure..... Pure.

His parents, when he was named, had no way of knowing that he would become anything but pure, but the instant Jesus spoke His name, he became what he was meant to be.

Isaiah tells us that God KNOWS each one of us before we are even knit together in our mother's womb. He has known through all eternity Who each of us is meant to be. He names us as pure ... holy.... patient.... temperate beloved.

And in those names, He also calls us to our vocation, that which will fulfill us and make us whole. He calls us wife....husband....child singlepriest.

Think on this, what would be missing among us if Fr. Jose had not answered when Jesus called him by name? His priesthood is not only essential to himself and who he is, but it is vital to who we are as the Body of Christ. And for this we are grateful.

It is important to remember that Our Lord always respects our free will. If Zacchaeus had not climbed the tree, that is, if he had not been open, I'm not so sure we would have this wonderful account in scripture.

But know this..... Jesus never stops calling.

So long as there is a breath still in us, He longs to call us by the name He has given us. He pierces our entire selves with His all-knowing eyes... and He loves us.... He loves YOU...even when we struggle to love ourselves.

He calls us out of the branches of our own personal sycamore trees.

Our trees might be named loneliness, sickness or anger. Bitterness, regret, sorrow, hurt. loss. Whatever it is, it is our own. It was a seedling, not planted by God, yet we often nurture it, give it whatever it needs to grow. It becomes the wood of our own crosses, but God, who can see us more clearly in its branches than we can see ourselves, calls us out of it so that He may help us to carry it. And He will continue to call us until the forest is cleared.

And when we feel that gaze, when we hear our names spoken by our Lord, we too, like Zacchaeus must “come down quickly”.

We must not hesitate because He wants to STAY WITH US! He wants to RESIDE in each of us, not just for the moment, for He is not just passing through, but through all eternity.

And finally, once we come down from that tree, we will be changed. Like Zacchaeus, the only authentic response to the God who Saves us is to be generous. Generous in love, thankfulness and compassion for all other generosities flows from these.

Earlier, I asked you to think what it would be like if Fr. Jose had not answered his call.

I leave you with these questions:

What are we missing among us when we ignore our call?

What is missing here and in ourselves when we refuse to answer to our name that is spoken by God?

The answer may surprise you, for in answering these, you may very well hear God call to you by that name known only by Him that He waits to reveal to you. The only question that remains is "Will I answer?"