

## THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME [C]

Wisdom 11: 22 - 12: 2

2 Thessalonians 1: 11 - 2: 2

Luke 19: 1 - 10

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We've been in the Ordinary Time of the Church's Year for some months now - hence the green vestments - but soon Ordinary Time will culminate in the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

Then the Church year begins all over again the following week with Advent.

The seasons in the Church's Calendar have a soothing rhythm - rather like a bossa-nova beat - and we can become so used to them that they feel like a comfortable pair of liturgical slippers!

It's easy to become blasé and bored with the supposed 'sameness' of Sunday; and I find myself falling into this trap, as I guess you do from time to time.

Becoming blasé and bored about being with the Lord in this particular and special way on Sunday - the Day when we always celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus - can come about for a number of reasons; but there's one in particular I'd like us to consider today.

Maybe it happens because we feel sneakily guilty at the thought that we can actually enjoy being a Christian, and being here at the Eucharist.

We shouldn't be here to enjoy the experience, but to get through it as quickly as possible, we think to ourselves.

Writing to Christians living in very difficult times, and being persecuted for their faith, Paul tells them to: "Always be joyful; for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."

1 Th. 5: 16 & 18

We're naturally happy sometimes, and sad on others; but Christian joy isn't dependent on circumstances, on our feelings, on our moods.

It actually flows from what Christ Jesus has done for us, and it's constant. Like: "A fresh, bubbling spring within [you], giving [you] eternal life." Jn. 4: 14 as Jesus promised the Samaritan woman at the well.

The Book of Wisdom says this of God: "You are merciful to all, and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent. For you love all things that exist." Wis. 11: 23 - 24

The Lord loves us: He wants us to come back to Him with all our hearts.

Through His grace, which is the undeserved love we receive from Him, we're given the power to live for Him; so that people will see in us, however dimly, the Lord Jesus.

Grace, repentance, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are the ingredients we need to experience for ourselves the constancy of Christian joy.

If this sounds abstract, big on theory, but little to do with putting it in to practice, then let's look at Zacchaeus because, in his life, you can see these three things happening.

This meeting of Jesus and Zacchaeus is a monumental encounter, worthy of Shakespeare or Grand Opera; and yet it's written down in such a measured way by Luke.

I think that's what makes it all the more true, because there's no great display of power or a miracle from Jesus.

In that respect, it's like the meeting Jesus has with Nicodemus in John's Gospel where Jesus says to him: "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." Jn. 3: 3

You can't understand who I am unless I draw you to myself; reveal myself to you: and the supreme unveiling of who Jesus really is will be on the Cross - the Tree of Life.

Because, Jesus says: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."

Jn. 12: 32

Luke simply says that: "When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up [into the tree] and said 'Zacchaeus! Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.'" Lk. 19: 5

Jesus saw straight through the layers of extortion, greed, and callous contempt that Zacchaeus had for his fellow human beings.

Saw through the layers of hard-heartedness, to the unspoken question emerging from behind Zacchaeus' hard, crafty look.

That question, which Zacchaeus had been repressing all his life: how do I find acceptance and love? How do I find true love?

He found the answer he'd been searching for when Jesus looked at him.

Jesus knew about tax-collectors: after all, one of His Apostles had been one - Matthew - and Jesus knew that, even though they couldn't resist the chance to make more for themselves than they should, there was a sickness of heart for which only He had the remedy.

In that meeting of their eyes, Zacchaeus was healed, and made whole again: he was born again.

It was as if all of his life before that moment had been a charade, a nasty dream, to which he'd been held captive, and now he was free.

And, you know, I believe: "God is in every person's life. Even if the life of a person has been a disaster, God is in this person's life. You can, you must try to seek God in every human life. Although the life of a person is a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust God."

Pope Francis: Interview with *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Sept. 30, 2013

That's just what Zacchaeus did - he trusted God. He turned round from all that had held him captive for so long, looked into the eyes of Jesus, and found release.

So: "Zacchaeus quickly climbed [from the tree] down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy." Lk. 19: 6

Then Zacchaeus: "Stood before the Lord." Lk. 19: 8 and gave evidence of his repentance in public.

Repentance here isn't just a change of heart involving a token, 'Sorry,' to the people he's extorted, but joyfully making restoration and restitution, which Zacchaeus is determined to do lavishly.

But by the time he's given half of his money away, and given back four times as much to those he's cheated, we can imagine that he'd find himself in seriously reduced circumstances. However, Zacchaeus doesn't care, because he's found something far greater than wealth and possessions; He's found Jesus or, should I say, Jesus has found Him.

Now, it's as if all the weight of sin and suffering had been lifted from his shoulders, and he could stand erect because, where Jesus is, there salvation is to be found, for those who enter into a personal, passionate, and intimate friendship with Him.

But Zacchaeus doesn't physically follow his Master, which he could have done to escape the puzzled, and probably still angry looks of his neighbours.

He's going to live out his new life right where he is; because where he is, now that he belongs to Jesus, there will be found the Lord's salvation.

Jesus says He came to seek and save those, like Zacchaeus, and like me, who are lost, and I'm so glad He has.

I hope that the Lord has called your name as he did to Zacchaeus, so that you: "May you have the power to understand how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is."

Eph. 3: 18

And, to achieve that God-given understanding, let's recognise those things in our lives that weigh us down under a weight of sin; repent of them, and know in our hearts that: "Salvation has come to [my] home today." Lk. 19: 9