

Homily of Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C, 2022

Wisdom 11:22-12:2; Psalm 145:1-2, 8-11, 13-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2; Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus was a Jew but was a chief tax collector for the Roman Empire. He made his wealth from the corrupt tax system at that time. His desire to see Jesus meant that he was dissatisfied with his own way of life. The Spirit of God ministered to his heart, and he responded to the ministrations. He did not harden his heart. Many times, the Spirit of God ministers to us but we harden our heart and do not respond.

Today's gospel tells us that Zacchaeus "was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.' And he came down quickly and received him with joy" (Luke 19:4-6).

Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus is a fulfillment of Matthew 18:3-4, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." To respond to God's invitation, Zacchaeus humbled himself and became childlike. He ran like a child. He climbed a tree like a child. Those who knew the wealthy Zacchaeus would have wondered whether he was out of his mind. If you have not been moved by the Spirit of God to desire God in such a way that some people consider you to be out of your mind, then something is still missing in your spiritual journey!

Zacchaeus' experience must not be taken literally. 'The crowd' and Zacchaeus 'short in stature' represent Zacchaeus' sins and weaknesses which prevented him from seeing Jesus. Zacchaeus running ahead represents his moving away from his past sinful life; and his climbing a sycamore tree represents his climbing to repentance.

We may have 'the crowd' and 'short statures' in form of our sins, weaknesses, relationships, worldly cares, excuses, and so on which prevent us from a close encounter with Jesus. Zacchaeus teaches us to 'run' and 'climb.'

Zacchaeus, also, teaches us that set-backs, failures, and all kinds of trials must not discourage us. We are not to give up or walk away when the 'crowd' and 'short statures' stand in our way. We are to 'run' and 'climb.'

The crowd not only stood in the way of Zacchaeus, they grumbled when they found out that they could not stop Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was not discouraged. He stood his ground. Therefore, like Zacchaeus, we must not only run and climb, we must also stand our ground.

Zacchaeus' experience is a fulfillment of Jeremiah 29:13-14, "When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me ... and I will change your lot..." When Zacchaeus encountered Jesus, Jesus changed his lot and salvation came to his house. We pray to have the same encounter with Jesus as Zacchaeus did. But like Zacchaeus, we must run, climb, and stand our ground.

We pray that those who acquired or acquire their wealth through stealing, robbery, extortion, cheating, bribery, and other corrupt means may experience the disturbance of soul and body which will lead them to repentance. "For what does it profit someone to gain the whole world and lose one's soul? (Mark 8:36).

Zacchaeus said, Behold, 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" (Luke 19:8). This statement stresses the fact that repentance is incomplete if it is without restitution.

We conclude our reflection with St. Paul's prayer in the second reading, "that our God may make [us] worthy of his calling and powerfully bring to fulfillment [our] every good purpose and [our] every effort of faith." Amen.

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