

Homily of Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

Concerning each one of us, St. Paul writes in Romans 7:19, "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do -- this I keep on doing." He also writes, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). However, we are not hopeless. In Psalm 130:3-4, the word of God assures us, "If you, Lord, keep account of sins, Lord, who can stand? But with you is forgiveness and so you are revered." Indeed, with God is forgiveness; which is why the first reading says, "But you have mercy on all... and you overlook people's sins that they may repent. ... Therefore, you rebuke offenders little by little, warn them and remind them of their sins they are committing, that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O Lord!" God speaks to us through Prophet Ezekiel, "For I find no pleasure in the death of anyone who die.... Turn back and live!" (Ezekiel 18:32). Instead of keeping account of repentant's sins, Psalm 23:6 says that indeed, God's goodness and mercy continue to pursue us all the days of our life.

St. Paul in the second reading cautions us to cast out all fears in our relationship with the Lord. He says, "We ask you, brothers, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling with him, not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or to be alarmed ..." Pope Francis says, "Mercy is the first attribute of God. God does not want anyone lost. His mercy is infinitely greater than our sins." The Pope, also, says, "The name of God is mercy. There are no situations we cannot get out of; we are not condemned to sink into quicksand."

In the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Year of Mercy, 2015, Pope Francis writes, "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy.... Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him." We see Jesus as the face of God's mercy in Zacchaeus in today's Gospel. Jesus showed mercy on him and forgave him his many sins.

Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus is a fulfillment of words of the Scripture:

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." Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector and a wealthy man became childlike, climbed a tree in order to see Jesus. Zacchaeus' childlikeness earned him salvation.

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..." Zacchaeus' desire and effort to see Jesus earned him salvation. He "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." Zacchaeus' experience must not be taken literally. "The crowd" and Zacchaeus' "short in stature" represent Zacchaeus' sins that prevented him from seeing Jesus. Zacchaeus running ahead represents his running away from his past sinful life; and his climbing a sycamore tree represents his climbing to repentance. By these, the words of Jeremiah came to fulfillment; Jesus changed his lot.

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

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

When Zacchaeus encountered Jesus, the face of God's mercy, his lot changed and salvation came to his house. May we have the same testimony as Zacchaeus, amen. "The name of God is mercy. There are no situations we cannot get out of; we are not condemned to sink into quicksand." On our part, however, we must 'run,' 'climb,' and 'stand.'

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