

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time



*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might have
eternal life.*

While our Sunday Mass readings this week do not include John 3:16, the essence of this scripture passage is woven into the theme of the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time. God—the Creator of all things—loved the universe and each one of us into existence. The author of the Book of Wisdom speaks poetically to the Lord in this Sunday's First Reading:

*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!*

As we fashion our understanding of God through the lens of our faith, this is very good news! Those of us who have experienced the darkness of active addiction, unchecked compulsions, and unhealthy attachments can testify to the need for a complete psychic change. This change does not happen on our own, and it demands willingness to trust that God will accompany us if we plunge ourselves into recovery.

Attitudes of shame may need to be evaluated as well. We have a tendency to hold tightly to memories of our own shortcomings and patterns of unworthiness. It might take us a while to shift from the idea that God is looking to punish us to the sentiment of gratitude we hear in the Book of Wisdom. An example of quick conversion can be found in this Sunday's Gospel Reading where a wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus was attempting to get a more intimate view of our Lord:

*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,
"Zacchaeus, come down quickly,
for today I must stay at your house."
And he came down quickly and received him with joy.
When they all saw this, they began to grumble,
saying,
"He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner."
But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,
"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."*

Reflection Questions

"No person likes to admit he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 30), which is why the first movement into the spiritual solution of recovery is to recognize that there is a problem. We went to great lengths to maintain our addictive and compulsive behavior. Therefore, climbing a tree in the middle of a crowd to get a better view of Jesus or seeking a recovery fellowship for a way out proclaims our willingness.

What seems to be an important step in the process of this tax collector's recovery and conversion is akin to Step 9—*made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others*. As a result of our addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments, we often owe a financial amends and are encouraged not to dodge our creditors. Zacchaeus met these requirements and then some.

Jesus remarked, "Today salvation has come to this house." Zacchaeus found his identity as "a descendant of Abraham" again, that is, a member of his community in good standing. What the adventure of this reformed tax collector reveals to us about God is at the core of the gospel or *good news*: "The Son of Man has come to search out and save what was lost."

- How has your understanding of God and your own identity changed since surrendering yourself to recovery and a spiritual way of life?
- Reflect upon and share about the experience of making amends to those you harmed (if you have begun or completed the Ninth Step).
 - What freedom have you found as a result?
- What promises are coming true in your life?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Wisdom 11:22-12:2

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14

Second Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10