

October 30, XXXI Sunday in Ordinary Time

The common theme of today's readings is the benevolent, compassionate, forgiving mercy of God for sinners and the response of repentance and conversion expected from us.

The first reading reminds us that God's Almighty Power includes His strength to be merciful. That is why God, Who created the universe mercifully, waits for sinners to repent. God continues to love us, even when we do not love Him in return. The reading focuses on the love God has for all He has created, the love that overlooks sin so that we all have time for repentance. God shows us His redemptive love through His mercy.

In the second reading, St. Paul encourages the Thessalonians to persevere in their Christian Faith, giving glory to God without idly waiting for the "second coming" of Christ in their lifetime. He advises them to continue to live good Christian lives every day, allowing God to work in them so that they may be worthy of their vocation as Christians.

Today's Gospel presents the story of the instantaneous conversion of the tax-collector, Zacchaeus, whom God's grace led to a moment of conversion. The account describes how Jesus recognized Zacchaeus for exactly what he was, a lost sinner in need of a Savior, and shows us how God's grace worked in Zacchaeus to lead him from idle curiosity to repentance, conversion, and restitution. The episode emphasizes the fact that such a conversion can only result from a person's fully receiving the love, acceptance, and grace offered to everyone by a merciful Lord.

We need to accept the Divine invitation for repentance. Jesus takes the initiative of knocking at the door of our souls, asking for entry. We have one thing in common with Zacchaeus: like him, we are all sinners, and we all need salvation. The total rehabilitation of a formerly sinful man accomplished by a process of discipleship: seeking, meeting, undergoing conversion, and following Jesus Who is God. To refuse to admit that we are sinners is a fundamental impediment to the working of the mercy and grace of God in our hearts. A second, more common impediment is to refuse to listen to the call to repentance, which God so frequently sends out to us. We are all sinners to a greater or lesser degree. Jesus is inviting each one of us to total conversion today by means of this Gospel lesson. Jesus is our loving Brother who died that we might live. He is the Son of God, a God of Infinite Love. Hence, let us expose and confess all our weaknesses and injustices to Him. Let us remember that Jesus loves us in spite of our

ugly thoughts, broken promises, sullied ideals, lack of prayer and Faith, resentments, and lusts. He will put us back on the straight road to Heaven. We will become again true “sons and daughters of Abraham.” In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus, acting through the priest in the confessional, ministers to us individually, just as he interacted individually with Zacchaeus. As Zacchaeus did, we, too, need to “come down,” to leave the perches of our pride and allow Jesus to go to work through his ministerial priests.

We need to love others as Jesus loves us, in spite of our sins. Jesus loved Zacchaeus—a sinner—and by that love Zacchaeus was transformed. How many parents and teachers can accept children lovingly, without first setting up standards of behavior as conditions for being loved? Sometimes we have the temptation to withhold love from people we consider sinners. For example, a husband and wife may have qualities that grate on each other, prompting one spouse to withhold love from the other. There may be a temptation to withhold one’s love from a rebellious teenager. Perhaps our children make choices that disappoint us, and we become so frustrated by the consequences of their poor choices that we withhold our love from them. Our boss may be unlovable and autocratic, or our neighbor may become an object of hatred because of his incessantly barking dog. But just as Jesus loved Zacchaeus, even though he was the worst of sinners, and loves us the same way, so we must love others in spite of their sin. Jesus expects this of us, so he offers us the gifts of strength and grace to do it, if we will accept these gifts and use them.

How would we respond to Jesus’ demand, “I must stay at your house today?” How would we react to such an invitation? Would we be ready to welcome Jesus into our home? Indeed, Jesus has visited the homes of each and every one of us! Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, we have received the indwelling Spirit of Christ within us. Through the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, we receive the Divine Presence of the Lord. Further, if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us (1 Jn. 4:13). Hence, let us be thankful to the Lord for coming to us. For those of us who have not yet received the Lord into our homes and lives, it is never too late to repent and welcome Him. Our Lord is a God of Love, Grace and Mercy. He does not wish to see anyone lost. If we allow Jesus to enter our lives, our lives will change. Grace is the driving power behind this transformation. As we continue with the celebration of the Holy Mass, let us pray for all of us who do not yet have the indwelling of the Lord God in our homes and lives. Let us ask the Lord to reach out to us all as he reached out to Zacchaeus. The result will be repentance, transformation, sanctification, salvation.