

Homily for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 Year C

The author in the Book of Wisdom is trying, in a sort of prayerful meditation, to reconcile within the same Godhead, the utter transcendence of this God beyond every living creature, and yet at the same time, who has a unique and merciful tenderness towards every sinner. He comes up with the answer and He prays, “In your sight, O Lord, the whole world is like a grain of dust that tips the scales, like a drop of morning dew falling to the ground. Yet you spare all things because all things are yours Lord, lover of life, You whose imperishable spirit is in all.”

God loves what He has created because His imperishable spirit is in all things. Without that spirit nothing created could exist nor could it continue to exist.

What a wonderful basis for the respect of all living creatures and created life, this spark of the Divine, the immortal in us all. But, in reality, all that starts out in a state of innocence, beauty and moral perfection can so very easily fall away from this imperishable spirit that is within us, especially in human life, through sin. That is what happens with us; God loves a sinner but hates the sin.

He loves that part of Himself that is within us, this imperishable spirit, but He hates the distortion, the sin. That is what happened to Zacchaeus. He lost his way. He was a senior tax collector, a man who abused his authority to enhance his own wealth at the expense of the poor. He was a collaborator for the Roman forces of occupation. People boycotted him, wrote him off and would not give him the time of day.

Wealth had not given him much happiness, but there was still that spark of imperishable spirit within him that drew him to listen to the words of Jesus. Jesus’ words reawakened his religious impulses, his moral sensitivity, and opened his eyes to his real faults.

The message of this Gospel is that nobody is beyond redemption. There are no limits of the possibility of salvation offered by Jesus.

Notice that Jesus takes initiative. He says, “Come down, I must stay at your house today.”

What was left of the imperishable spirit that was within Zacchaeus heard and responded to the fullness of the imperishable spirit within Jesus, God made Man.

Jesus’ words penetrated him and reawakened his moral courage and sensitivity.

God's grace can turn a life completely upside down. The greater the sinner the more forgiving He is.

There is no past, no matter how shameful, that cannot be given a fresh start.

Hiding within each of us there is a sinful Zacchaeus, seeking out the Lord to save us and give us a fresh start, and new hope. The impetus is always there in the stirrings of our conscience, the Lord passing by. Like Zacchaeus we must take full advantage of His passing by. The promptings of God's imperishable spirit is within us. We must listen to it and acknowledge our sins and open our hearts once more to His goodness.

The real focus of this story is on the last line of the Gospel, 'the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost.'

Before Jesus all men are sinners like Zacchaeus.

The Lord has come to save us and He meets us at the point of our need, no strings attached.

He is waiting to change our lives as soon as we show a willingness to open up the doors of our hearts and let His salvation get to work in the very centre of our beings, where that imperishable spirit eternally dwells.

Deep will always call unto the deep.

To paraphrase Psalm 129,

From out of my depths I cry to thee O Lord,

Lord hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading.

If You O Lord should mark my guilt, Lord who would survive?

But with you is found forgiveness; and for this I revere you.

My soul is waiting for the Lord, and I count on His word.

My soul is longing for the Lord more than a watchman does for day-break.

Because with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption

And He will redeem me from all my sins.