

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Wisdom 11:22-12:1 / Luke 19:1-10)
30.10.2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

There are two ways to read the story of Zacchaeus.

We can focus on the person of Zacchaeus and place him at the centre of the story.

Zacchaeus is anxious to see Jesus.

Since Zacchaeus is short in stature and cannot see Jesus because of the crowd, he runs ahead and climbs a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Him as He passes that way.

Zacchaeus offers hospitality to Jesus.

Zacchaeus gives half of his property to the poor and compensates generously those he has cheated as a tax collector.

This is the story of Zacchaeus meeting with Jesus and Zacchaeus seems to be the protagonist.

But if we read the story attentively, we discover that Jesus is already there before Zacchaeus:

“Jesus enters Jericho and is going through the town when a man whose name is Zacchaeus makes his appearance”.

Zacchaeus from his sycamore tree tries to catch a glimpse of Jesus, but Jesus looks up and speaks to him first!

Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' house. Jesus brings salvation to Zacchaeus and his household.

If we follow this second reading of the text, we see that, in the relationship between Jesus and Zacchaeus, Jesus is the protagonist and He always takes the initiative.

Now, let us consider our own relationship with Jesus. Who is the protagonist: Is it us or is it Jesus? Like Zacchaeus, we desire to see Jesus, to listen to Him, to touch Him, to live in his presence and do his will. But, let us not be naïve: we would not have this desire if Jesus had not first put it into our hearts. We would not be seeking the face of the Lord if the Lord had not given us the desire to do so. We would not be seeking the Lord if the Lord had not already revealed Himself to us at least partially. In our relationship with the Lord, the Lord has the initiative, He is in control, He precedes us on the path of our lives.

But, alas, it happens that we forget that the Lord is in charge and sometimes we take our spiritual life in hand. We do things for Jesus, and little by little, often without being aware of it, we try to save ourselves by our works, even our good works. The truth is that we cannot save ourselves. We need to receive our salvation from another. Jesus alone can save us.

It is Jesus who loves us first. We have to receive his love, and allow his love to accomplish his work within us. Christ is our only Saviour. He will manifest himself to us when he wants and how he wants. Jesus is before us and is ready to walk with us, to show us the way to life.

The spiritual life is about waiting for and receiving what was promised to us by the Lord. We need patience and perseverance. In the spiritual life, we should not be in the driving seat, but we

should be seated on the passenger seat! But how often we drive the car ourselves! The consequence is that we become exhausted and have the impression of getting nowhere. We become depressed. When we find ourselves in this situation, how important it is to come back to the Lord, to place our trust in Him – confident in His promise to be with us always – so that the Lord may lead us on the path of life and freedom! We have to consent to die to our own plans and strategies, in order to wait for, discern and welcome the Lord's newness, He who makes all things new. At certain hours, this process can be crucifying, but this is a death for life. We cannot experience the Lord's resurrection in our lives without passing through the mystery of Good Friday

In any case, the good news of today's gospel passage is Jesus' desire to come and make his home in our hearts; not in the hearts of a few elect and holy people, but in the heart of each one of us without exception if only we consent to welcome Him.

Zacchaeus was not a holy man, far from it. He was a collaborator of the hated Roman occupiers, a wealthy man who exploited his own people. Even his appearance did not serve him well. He was short, too short to see Jesus because of the crowd and was therefore obliged to climb a sycamore tree. This was the ultimate humiliation for such an important personage!

If Jesus took an interest in Zacchaeus, He will take an interest in us too. There is hope for each one of us. The Lord considers us just as we are, with the weight of our sins, our shame and guilt, our poverty, our misery, that hidden dimension to our lives which is hidden from most. Jesus knows us, sees us, calls us and invites himself into our home, into our hearts: not an ideal home; not a clean heart, but our hearts as they are, messy and disordered as they are.

By the help of God's grace, our hearts are called to become places wherein we welcome Jesus, wherein we listen to Him, wherein we remain in his presence. Our hearts should be the place wherein we make our life choices and take our decisions in communion with the Lord. Our hearts should be the place where God's kingdom comes, where God's will is done

Following the example of Zacchaeus, Jesus' coming into our hearts is an invitation to change, to share what we have with those in need. It is also an invitation to repent, to make reparation for the wrong we have done.

But the full picture is that the coming of Jesus into our hearts is the coming of our salvation. With Jesus, we are set free from sin and death. With the Lord's visit our sins are forgiven, life is victorious over death; death is transformed into a passage through to plenitude of life.

Let us close our eyes and listen to the word of the Lord: "Today, I must stay at your house". Let us open our hearts to the Lord and remain in his presence. He comes with the desire to make all things new within us and all around us.