

31<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Zacchaeus is Surprised by Grace”.

Fr. Frank Schuster

I love that first line from the Book of Wisdom today, “Before the Lord the whole universe is as a grain from a balance or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.” That isn’t very reassuring, is it? This can have a way of making us, as well as all the matters that are important to us, seem rather small. However, the Book of Wisdom does give us perspective and an important glimpse into God’s point of view, I suppose. The next sentence however is much more promising when the author continues his prayer to God by saying, “But you [O God] have mercy on all, because you can do all things; and you overlook people's sins that they may repent.” This should make us feel a little better. God is patient with us. God overlooks our sins in the hopes that we will have a conversion of heart.

Zacchaeus was used to being overlooked. Luke reminds his audience that Zacchaeus was “short in stature”. He was the chief tax collector which made him a collaborator with the Roman occupiers, essentially the most hated person in town. He was wealthy because he benefited financially by being in league with the Romans. Jesus could have ordered the tree that Zacchaeus was in to be burned to the ground and there would probably have been cheers from the crowd. That is how hated Zacchaeus was. Jesus however fulfills what was said about him in the Book of Wisdom, “But you [O God] have mercy on all, because you can do all things; and you overlook people’s sins that they may repent.”

Jesus looked up at this man in the tree and said, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” I am fascinated that Jesus doesn’t ask Zacchaeus for permission to stay at his house. Jesus simply tells Zacchaeus, “Today I must stay at your house.” This is how much Jesus hungers for Zacchaeus’ conversion. And this is how much Jesus hungers for our conversion.

What happens when Jesus is welcomed into our house? Zacchaeus has a profound moment of conversion where he proclaims to the whole town, “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.” Zacchaeus understood that words were not enough. He knew that talk was cheap and that his actions needed to speak louder than words, so he gave a very visible and tangible sign to the Lord and to the community that his conversion of heart was real. Jesus, recognizing Zacchaeus’ true conversion of heart, responds, “Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.” Just like we heard from the Book of Wisdom, “But you [O God] have mercy on all, because you can do all things; and you overlook people’s sins that they may repent.”

My friends, there is so much to reflect on from the Gospel reading this Sunday. What are the areas in our lives that feel “short in stature”, so to speak, that simply don’t measure up the way they should? What are the areas in our lives that feel stuck in a tree, a place where we long to see Jesus, but perhaps only from a distance? How are we like the townspeople, grumbling that Jesus would have the audacity to give the time of day to a known sinner? Can we enter into this story for a moment, and see Jesus looking straight at us with a patient love and hear his words, “Come down from that tree. Today I must stay at your house”? What is our response? What would that look like for my house today, if Jesus wanted to stay there?

We have this opportunity today at Mass when we come forward for communion. Every reception of Holy Communion is an opportunity for a radical conversion of heart that can welcome Jesus into our homes, putting our lives back on track the way God wants for us. Do we dare to receive Jesus in the Eucharist that way? I think at times we can be overwhelmed by God’s invitation. Sometime we look at the universe around us and contemplate how to God all our concerns must be like a grain in a balance or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth. However, if we accept Jesus invitation today and welcome him into our homes, into our hearts, into our souls like Zacchaeus, an amazing thing just might happen. We might be surprised by grace.