



Homily for
THE THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
29/30 October, 2016

Fr. Dwayne's homilies follow...

31st Sunday – Cycle C – 2016 October 30, 2016 Holy Spirit (SH/HT)

Wis 11:22 – 12:2 II Thess 1:11-2:2 Lk 19:1-10

“...I wish to stay at your house today.” I. Every Christian's life is comprised of three stories: there is “my” story, Jesus' story

and “our” story. We have our own individual life history – at some point we encounter the Jesus story – and then, out of that, there grows a third story: what can happen when we encounter Jesus. The story of Zacchaeus dramatically illustrates what might happen.

II. So, who is this “Zacchaeus?” Scripture ordinarily does not give us physical details about the figures in the

bible. Scripture is not interested in that. While we might be curious about their physical appearance, such descriptions would probably distract us from the more profound message of scripture anyway. We are only given such details when it helps to explain the message. So, for example, we are told Goliath was a giant of a man – probably helping us to realize how remarkable it would be that David could slay him with a stone. And today we are told Zacchaeus was “short of stature.” To be politically correct, today we would probably say he was “vertically challenged!” But that detail helps to embolden the message of this story.

So, who was Zacchaeus? He was a “chief” tax collector in Jericho. As a tax

collector he worked for the Romans. As such, he collected taxes from fellow Judeans to hand over to the Romans. As “chief” tax collector, he probably had some oversight over other tax collectors. The Romans didn’t care how the tax collectors did their work, just as long as they got their cut. So there’s lots of room for extortion and cheating. Scripture tells us Zacchaeus was wealthy – which implies he knew how to work the system. AND, he was “short of stature.” We could take that as a symbol of who Zacchaeus was in the eyes of the people – below them. But it certainly explains why Zacchaeus had to climb the sycamore tree – so that he could see this celebrity named “Jesus” making his way through town. It is likely that was all Zacchaeus intended to do: just to see the One every- one is talking about – and then go back to collecting taxes.

III. Jesus spots him up in the tree and yells out, “Zacchaeus, I want to stay at your house today.” Zacchaeus’ life story now intersects with Jesus’ life story.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. At this point, Jesus is very near the end of his earthly life: no more traveling around Israel, the parables have all been told, most of the miracles have happened and there’s only a little more teaching left. Jericho is the last stop before Jerusalem and Jesus’ last week on earth. The sinner Zacchaeus encounters the holy One, Jesus. “I wish to stay at your house today.”

These were exactly the words Zacchaeus needed to hear. Even if he was an honest tax collector, like any human being, Zacchaeus was a sinner and in need of redemption. Perhaps being “short of stature” symbolizes where he was *spiritually* speaking: a sinful man in need of hearing Jesus extend this invitation.

IV. And who are you and I? We are sinful men and women – with our own life history – we have had our

moments when we’ve done fairly well living as a disciple of Jesus – and we have dark moments of sin and betrayal which remain hidden. Like Zacchaeus, we may have spent our time amassing possessions, gaining wealth – or in other ways following pursuits and priorities which have nothing to do with living as a holy disciple of Jesus. All of this we carry in our heart.

And then there comes a point where our life story and Jesus’ story intersects and Jesus says to us, “I wish to stay at your house today.”

How do we respond? V. When Zacchaeus heard those words, he said, "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. In other words, Zacchaeus' heart was open. Those words lifted any burden Zacchaeus may have been carrying. Those words freed Zacchaeus. They were exactly the words he needed to hear at that point in his life.

How can those words touch your heart and my heart today? In what ways can you accept that invitation of Jesus? What is the burden you want him to lift? What is the sin you want Jesus to forgive? How can those words change your heart and your life? What is the new life you fashion together with Jesus?

VI. Once again, we hear another message of God's mercy. That is a theme that has been repeated over and over again throughout this Year of Mercy.

Everywhere – in scripture reading after scripture reading – in homilies – in reflection booklets – articles – prayer resources – God's message of mercy jumps at us.

Especially here in the Eucharist, we are always invited into God's mercy. Here we have the opportunity to respond to that invitation to receive Jesus into our home. Here we can say – Yes, Lord! Amen!

31st Sunday – Cycle C – 2016 October 30, 2016 Holy Spirit (SH – Mass of Remembrance)

Wis 11:22 – 12:2 II Thess 1:11-2:2 Lk 19:1-10

"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

I. God's mercy has called us together today. We gather this morning to immerse ourselves in God's mercy – much as we

might immerse ourselves into a hot tub, allowing the swirling hot water to soothe our muscles, relaxing our tired bones, imagining the stresses of the day to drift away into the air.

We gather this morning to immerse ourselves in God's mercy – *for ourselves* –

praying to deepen our faith in Christ's promise of resurrection and new life for our deceased loved ones. The trauma of death in our life brings us back to pondering that foundational tenant of our faith which reassures us death is not the end, but only a transition – as the first preface for the dead teaches, “life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven.”

We gather this morning to immerse ourselves in God's mercy – for our loved ones who have now gone before us. We come as ambassadors for them – holding their dear name and memory in our hearts and in our minds – praying they are the beneficiaries of God's mercy: eternal rest grant unto to them, O Lord.

As good and holy our loved ones may have been, we know, too, they were human – susceptible to the dangers of temptation and sin. And so we pray for their purification and welcome to God's heavenly banquet. That is what Purgatory is – a statement of God's mercy – yet another opportunity to know of God's mercy, even in the afterlife.

For this is God's desire – that all of his creation should know of the fullness of eternal life with him. God wants nothing more than this. As Jesus proclaimed to Zacchaeus and the crowd gathered with him: “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.

II. Zacchaeus first heard those words when he climbed that sycamore tree one day in Jericho.

Consider Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus – a chief tax collector in Jericho, a wealthy man – someone who collected taxes for the hated Romans. Zacchaeus was probably deeply immersed in his business – collecting coins, making a profit, gathering possessions. Then one day he heard of this local celebrity – someone by the name of Jesus – was passing through town. Since he was a little guy, Zacchaeus climbed that sycamore tree, hoping to catch a glimpse of Jesus. Their eyes met and Jesus invited Zacchaeus to invite him to his house! And Zacchaeus accepted the invitation.

It was really an invitation to know God's mercy. For Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “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.” Consider also the crowd. They also would have heard Jesus proclaim these

words. And perhaps they are the true intended audience, for the name Zacchaeus means righteous. And the original Greek has Zacchaeus’ statement in the present tense – meaning Zacchaeus does *now, already*, give half his goods to the poor and if he has defrauded anyone he restores it fourfold. Zacchaeus is living up to his name: righteous.

That renders Jesus’ statement even more force: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.”

That includes you and me.

III. As we gather this morning, holding in our hearts our love for our dear ones, may we hear those words of mercy once again for ourselves. Throughout this Year of Mercy it seems every page I turn in the Roman Missal contains the word “mercy.” Every scripture reading I pick up communicates a message of mercy. God’s mercy for us is a message we cannot hear too often, or reflect upon too frequently.

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.”

Thank God for these words of mercy – allow them to seep deeply into every part of your being – as we wait with hope for what God has in store for each of us.