

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 4, 2007

Wisdom 11: 22 - 12: 1; 2 Thes. 1: 11 - 2: 2; Lk. 19: 1 - 10

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Today's account of Zacchaeus, so familiar to us, is full of wonderful details: the sycamore tree, the small figure of Zacchaeus himself, the murmuring crowd that surrounds him, Jesus' summons to the little man to come down from the tree, and the promise that closes the account, "Salvation has come to this house."

Amid these details, we are challenged by Zacchaeus' pledge to right the wrongs he has done: returning four-fold, money unjustly taken and caring for the poor with half of his own belongings.

The detail that we might easily miss is Jesus' freely chosen insertion into the home of this tax collector. This is not an invitation offered by a host and accepted by a guest. It is, rather, the reverse of that: the guest makes himself at home with no invitation. In doing so, Jesus fills this man's home with abundant grace and promise.

This taking over of another's home or work space is done more than once by Jesus. When Jesus chooses to instruct the people from Peter's boat, he simply gets in to the boat and later tells Peter, the owner of the boat, to push out into deep water. Again when he sends his disciples out two by two, he tells them to act in this same way: choose a house and stay in it, not moving from place to place. At the beginning of his ministry as he is asked about his own dwelling, Jesus simply tells the disciples of John to "come and see."

As we rush about, stopping briefly in a home or store and then quickly moving on, we may easily miss a significant nuance of these scriptural accounts: we can miss the sense of centeredness that underscores the accounts. When John's disciple asks Jesus where he lives, they are asking, not about a physical space, but about the core of his life. What is it that allows him to live as he does? What is the ground of his being? And so placing himself in Peter's boat and inviting himself to Zacchaeus' home, Jesus is asking to bring a fullness to these places. He is eager to move into the minds and wills, bodies and imaginations, nerves and bones of people.

This fullness the Church has already reminded us of in the first two readings for this Sunday. The passage from Wisdom tells us that God loves all that he has created and that his imperishable spirit dwells in all things. And Paul's letter assures us that, as we await the return of the Lord, we work in the faith that has been granted to us.

Our challenge for the days and weeks ahead is allow our own spaces to be invaded by the graciousness of our God. The successes or failures of what we are about have nothing to do with God's "invasion" of our space. It is not the goal we set for ourselves but the graces offered by God that gift us with transformation and that allow us to say with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."