

31st Sunday of Ordinary Time
Oct. 31, 2004

Wisdom 11:22-12:2, Psalm 145, 2Thes 1:11- 2:2, & Luke 19:1-10
Preaching by: S. Agnes Lanthier, O.P.

HE HAS GONE TO STAY IN THE HOUSE OF A SINNER

Have you ever found yourself out on a limb – literally? I have; I was ten. The account of Zacchaeus in the tree reminds me of the panic I felt when I realized I could not jump off the end of the long branch where I had climbed; the ground was too far below me. I could not turn around and return the way I came; no one was near to help me. Petrified, I inched my way backwards to the trunk - quite a contrast to Zacchaeus who came down from the sycamore quickly and joyfully to be received by the loving forgiveness of Jesus!

Who was Zaccaeus?

The profile given us by Robert Obach shows him as a greedy, dishonest extortionist collaborating with the Roman forces, and as a chief tax collector in Jerico, making himself rich at the expense of his countrymen. In the eyes of the Jews, tax collectors were notorious sinners.

Scripture does not tell us how Zacchaeus knew about Jesus. As a dishonest rich man, he would not be interested in His message. But there was something about Jesus that drew Zacchaeus to climb the sycamore for a glimpse of one who was yet unknown. (Talbert)

Zacchaeus, come down. I must stay at your house today.

What did Jesus see in Zacchaeus?

A man who was not afraid of the ridicule to which his vantage point in the tree might expose him;

A man who would not be intimidated by the hostile and scornful glance of those who knew him (Stoger);

A man who realize that he was a sinner, but who promised to make restitution beyond what the law required, and to share his wealth with the poor.

Jesus saw a man who realized that making contact with him meant more than anything else -

And he came down quickly and received Jesus with joy.

How often, Lord, you have come to my house, and I have received you because I believe. Strengthen my faith; grant me a conviction of your presence in me and in all whom I meet.

When they all saw this, they began to grumble saying: "He has gone to stay in the house of a sinner."

Grumbling can be an interesting pastime:

We grumble at our own stupidity and forgetfulness -

At the way others talk, and dress and vote -

At the sinners we meet in the daily paper, radio, and TV.

We grumble sometimes at the young and the not - so - young relatives and friends who have left the Church. But the Lord can meet them on their spiritual journey with him,– in spite of their detours. May we never think of them as sinners but, like Jesus, may we never hesitate “to stay at their house.”

And so those who grumbled at Jesus were grumbling because he was associated with a sinner that they had repudiated. When Jesus came into the house of Zacchaeus, he brought forgiveness. And in the presence of all the grumblers, Jesus specifically reinstated Zacchaeus as a practicing Jew.

Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendent of Abraham.

The unconditional love and mercy of Jesus is evident in the account of the rich man Zacchaeus, whose spiritual poverty was so manifest. How confident and grateful we should be to Him. Who has revealed to us His great mercy and love for –

He has gone to stay in the house of a sinner!