

Thirty-First Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's bounty and mercy. They show that God keeps his creation in life because he loves each one of those he has created. They also invite us to repent of our sins so that we come to enjoy God's bounty and mercy.

The first reading describes the bounty of God. It shows that the whole universe is counted for nothing before God. However, God loves all his creatures because if it were not so, they would not have existed. He forgives people's sins so that they come to repent. Even when he rebukes people, he wants them to abandon their wickedness and believe in him.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is creator and is loving of his creation. Another idea is the truth that he is merciful and forgiving. Because he forgives the sins, people should not dwell in their sins, but rather take advantage of his bounty and repent of their sins.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it tells us the story of Zacchaeus. First of all, the Gospel mentions Jesus' crossing through the town of Jericho.

At that time a wealthy man and a chief of tax collectors named Zacchaeus wanted to see him. But, as he could not do it because of his short size, he climbed a tree with the intention of seeing Jesus when he passes. When Jesus came at his level and saw him, he invited him to come down and offered to stay at his home.

Surprised by the turn of the events, Zacchaeus received Jesus with joy. When people saw what happened, they all criticized Jesus for having gone to stay at the house of a sinner. But, Zacchaeus, taking advantage of the situation, pledged to offer the half of his possessions to the poor and to pay back four times over what he has extorted from people.

In reaction, Jesus assured Zacchaeus that salvation has come to his house because, he too, is a descendant of Abraham. The Gospel finishes with a statement of Jesus affirming that the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what is lost.

What to do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about God's mercy and the duty of conversion. In fact, the Gospel brings before us a strong criticism of Jesus from the people for having gone to the house of Zacchaeus, while Zacchaeus himself was full of joy.

In order to understand the paradox we are dealing with here, we have to bear in mind that Zacchaeus was a tax collector. In Jewish society, tax collectors were not seen as considerate or religious people at all. By profession, tax collectors were Jews who were working for the Roman administration by gathering the public revenue. As such, the population disliked them for their collaboration with the occupying power. Moreover, because of their greed, they extorted the population and enriched themselves dishonestly. In that sense, it was normal that an orthodox Jew had to avoid being associated with such a type of people.

And yet, in spite of all that, Jesus will go to his home. Why? Jesus does so, first of all, in order to show us that God loves each one of us in the same way, even when we are

sinner. If that is the case, then, he does not lock us in our sins. Rather, he always offers us a new chance so that those who have strayed away from him may abandon their bad ways and come to salvation. That is why he says that “the son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost”.

Literally, a thing is lost when it is gone out of its own place for a wrong place. And when we find such a lost thing, we bring it back to its place. In the same way, a person is lost when that person is missing where he should be, and that place he should be is to be with God. It is, then, in God we find our peace. Any wandering far from God puts us in danger of losing our salvation.

Second. By going to the house of Zacchaeus regardless of people’s opinion, Jesus shows that God’s mercy prevails over human sins. If it were not the case, it would make no sense for him to go to the house of Zacchaeus while everybody held him as a public sinner. But it means also that even when society judges us as a public sinner or that it rejects someone as a notorious criminal because of the bad things he has done, that person still counts for God. God does not judge us in the same way that society does.

This point is very crucial for our relationship with God. We have to come to understand that God’s love for us is unconditional. Even when we are bad persons, he still loves us. In that sense, no one has the right to detest himself because of bad things he has done in his life. I believe that it is also important to forgive ourselves because God forgives us. Whoever does not forgive himself for the bad he has done in his life will never appreciate God’s forgiveness.

Does it mean that because God forgives us, the sinner shall dwell in his sins? No. The sinner has to change and abandon his bad ways. He has to make amends for his sins. That is exactly what Zacchaeus has done by pledging to give half of his riches to the poor and another half to make restitution for the fraud he practiced. That is why the more God forgives us, the more we have to repent of our sins.

Let me now finish with a general remark. Zacchaeus was a rich and successful man. Whatever might be the way he got his riches and the judgment society had of him, he certainly was someone who, materially speaking, had succeeded in his life. But, in spite of his riches, he was not happy. And that is the reason why he wanted to see Jesus, because something was missing in his life. This point teaches us that in spite of all the possessions human beings can have in this world, God alone can give us the true joy that nobody can take away. Let us, pray, then that God may fill us with his joy! May we repent of our sins as God shows us his bounty and mercy! God bless you all!

Wisdom 11: 22-12: 2; 2Thessalonians 1: 11-2: 2; Luke 19: 1-10



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