

31<sup>st</sup> Ordinary Sunday  
November 3, 2019  
“Feeling Trapped”

Wis 11:22-12:2

2Thes 1:11-2:2

Lk 19:1-10

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

One of the sad facts of life is that people can become seemingly trapped by their decisions. There are consequences of our various behaviors. There are consequences, as well, when we fail to do something we should. Often we make a decision based upon how we can enjoy increased benefits in the here and now – in some way or in some area. In these decisions we are focused, almost exclusively, upon ourselves.

And then, at some point, we realize that what we are doing is really not what is best for us after all. However, obligations, associations, and fear of loss keep us where we are for we are trapped because of them. We are trapped by the very wealth, power, people, position, or pleasure that were the reason for our decision in the first place! What is most tragic of all is when we sacrifice God and our very soul for the pseudo-gods of this world and their false promises. This, undoubtedly, was the case of Zacchaeus in the Gospel today from St. Luke.

Zacchaeus was a Jew who was employed by Rome, the occupying power. He was the chief tax collector for Jericho and its environs. He had other tax collectors under him, each with his own designated area. Rome set the amount. But Rome allowed each tax collector to add a percentage to the basic tax, for their own income and personal gain. Unfortunately, this was often abused by the agent.

Consequently, tax collectors were hated by the people. Considered to be beyond salvation, they were shunned by everyone, and were banned from the synagogue and the Temple!

Zacchaeus was trapped by the decision he had made long before. As he grew older, he probably realized how much he truly needed God, as well as his fellow Hebrews. He had heard about Jesus, his teaching, and his miracles – and Zacchaeus probably wondered a lot about himself!

We can well imagine his surprise and utter joy when Jesus spotted him in the sycamore, almost ordered him down, and then invited himself to Zacchaeus' house! This was beyond Zacchaeus' wildest dreams! Jesus had reached out to him! God had not forgotten him! God had not abandoned him! There was hope for Zacchaeus after all!

So Zacchaeus hurried down – only to be met by the disdain of the crowd and their disgruntled anger toward Jesus. Nevertheless, he paid public tribute to Jesus, by embracing the teaching of Jesus for the poor, and that of justice toward everyone. Zacchaeus would give half of his considerable wealth to the poor – Moreover, any injustice he had perpetrated he would repay four times over what he had done!

Then Jesus taught another wonderful lesson. As Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham and part of the Old Covenant – so also is every person created a child of God and included in the New Covenant of God's mercy that Jesus came to establish! Moreover, the whole mission of Jesus as God's Son was and continues to be to save those lost souls considered to be beyond any hope!

Brothers and Sisters, all of us have sinned. Some of us might feel trapped by a decision we made recently or long ago. Some of us might wonder if there is, really, any hope for us.

However, we must never forget that we have a God of infinite mercy and forgiveness. As the Book of Wisdom teaches us, the Lord of the whole universe cares about each of us. He is patient with us. He will overlook our sins, so that we can repent. He, often times, leads us very gradually to recognize our faults and sins. And His grace gives us the power to break with them and take the next step toward Him and His hope!

So, let us pray, today, in the words of St. Paul – that God may make us worthy of His calling and bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith – so that we may give glory to Him and to Jesus our Savior!

Amen.

November 3, 2019

Msgr. Russell G. Terra