

31ST SUNDAY - ORD. TIME (C)
THE LOVING AND MERCIFUL GOD

The creation story tells us that when God finished creating everything He intended to, He saw that it was very good; Gen. 1:31. Thus, nothing in the world created by God is bad. Evil entered the world, as we know, through the liar and deceiver, the devil, and by our own pride.

After the fall it is at the back of our minds that God is forever angry with us. We even accuse God of not being fair to us as it happened at the time of Ezekiel, the prophet. The Israelites accused God of being unfair to them; "Now, you say, 'What the Lord does is unjust.' Now listen, House of Israel: is what I do unjust? Is it not what you do that is unjust? When the upright abandons uprightness and does wrong and dies, he dies because of the wrong which he himself has done. Similarly, when the wicked abandons wickedness to become law-abiding and upright, he saves his own life...And yet the house of Israel says, 'What the Lord does is unjust.' So in future, House of Israel, I shall judge each of you by what that person does. Repent, renounce all your crimes, avoid all occasions for guilt. Shake off the crimes you have committed, and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit! Why die, House of Israel?" Eze. 18:25-32.

Today, wisdom makes it clear to us that God loves what He has created. He loves all things that are and loathes nothing that He has made; for what He hated He would not have fashioned. He spares all things because they are His, and He is a lover of souls. Therefore God overlooks people's sins that they may repent. He rebukes offenders little by little, warns them and reminds them of the sins they are committing, and that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in Him.

The Lord wants our salvation but He will not force it on us. He reminds us to return to Him because He is full of love and mercy. I have to make the effort to approach Him. This is what Zacchaeus did. He wanted to see Jesus but had height impediment. He found ways and means to see Jesus so he did something unthinkable; he climbed a tree. He did not think about what people would say seeing a rich man on a tree; he did not allow his short stature to prevent him from seeing Jesus.

His efforts bore fruit. He did not just see Jesus, he hosted Him. That led to a change of heart and he renounced all his sins. He was ready to turn over a new leaf. He was forgiven and salvation came to his house. This means that it was not he alone who repented, or received forgiveness, but his wife and

children and all in his house. He received something more than the riches he was running after. If you allow Jesus into your life all other things are rubbish. St. Paul told the Philippians; "I reckon everything as complete loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have thrown everything away; I consider all as mere garbage, so that I may gain Christ and be completely united with Him," (Phil. 3:8).

How do I respond to the mercy and love of God? What steps am I taking to turn my back to the world and focus on the Lord? Is salvation precious to me? Many of us deceive ourselves and say that God is merciful, no matter what I do He will save me. Yes He will forgive, but He always forgives those who are willing to be forgiven. He saves those who want to be saved. Jesus once told the Pharisees, "You are of this world; I am not of this world. I have told you already; you will die in your sins. Yes, if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins," Jn. 8:23-24.

We have to remember that The Lord loves what He has made and wants to preserve it, so it is important for us to obey Him and strive to do what pleases Him. When we avoid sin and do good, it is a way of giving glory to His name. How do you feel when you see your children and grandchildren doing well in life? Their success is glory to you. So with God. This is the prayer of St. Paul for the church in Thessalonica, "that God may fulfil every good resolve and work of faith by His power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

What is your impediment of seeing Jesus? What do you have to let go in your life? What reparations are you to make? Have you decided to follow Jesus? Jesus passes by every day in the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist but many of us do not see Him because we do not open our hearts to Him to let His grace fill us to live a new life in Him. Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things shall be given to you. (Mt. 6:33).

30TH SUNDAY - ORD. (C)
THE PRAYER OF THE HUMBLE PIERCES THE CLOUDS

Last week we were told to pray persistently, or to pray without growing weary. Today the message the readings give us is to pray with humility. This is what the first reading talks about, and Jesus and St. Paul give us examples of how God listens to the prayer of the lowly.

Sirach tells us that the Lord is a God of justice, and with Him is no partiality. He has no favourites. He listens to the prayers of the poor and the one who is wronged. He hears the wail of the orphan, and the complaints of the widow. "The one who serves God willingly is heard; the prayer of the humble pierces the clouds". God is always on the side of justice and righteousness.

St. Paul tells us that God does not abandon us even though human beings may do so. This is what he told Timothy: "At my first defence no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me...But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the word fully, that all the Gentiles might hear it". He was in prison, and found himself on the point of being sacrificed, all the same he knew that the just God was with him.

The Pharisee, instead of praising God, congratulated himself and gave the details of what he was doing. He thought the mere fact that he was fulfilling the law was enough to be considered holy. He despised others including the tax collector. He took the place of God and passed judgment on the tax collector. But the tax collector did not consider himself worthy even to raise his head in prayer. He admitted that he was a sinner. His prayer was heard, not that of the Pharisee.

Jesus was clothed with humility, and He told His disciples to learn from Him to be meek and humble of heart; (Mt.11:29). St. Peter also told the believers: "And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble," (1Pet. 5:5). Peter himself had expressed to Jesus before, that he was a sinner, when through obedience, he and his companions had had a good catch of fish. He said to Jesus: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man," (Lk. 5:8). In the Magnificat, the Blessed Mother, Mary, revealed how the Lord God cast down the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly; (Lk.1:52).

God has no favourites so He hears the cry of the poor, and listens to those who serve Him willingly. We do not, and cannot impress God with external display of righteousness. We have to worship Him and serve Him with a

humble and contrite heart, for “the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, God will not despise,” (Ps.51:52).

Do we think we are more righteous than others? That is spiritual pride. That can even prevent us from going to confession, because we always see ourselves of having no sin, or consider ourselves more holy than the priest at the confessional. It can also lead to trumpeting the small good things we do. Spiritual pride can also lead to vainglory, like the Pharisee who praised himself.

We are to worship God in spirit and in truth. Our prayer should bring us close to God and the other Christian. My prayer must help me love more and not to despise others. St. Paul’s desire was to proclaim the word of God so that the Gentiles too might know Christ and come to Him. He prayed that there would be no charge levelled against those who deserted him. He was oppressed but God listened to his prayer.

True prayer is expression of faith in God, and surrendering one’s self into the mighty hands of God. When we pray with humility we are telling God that His will be done in our lives. We submit our will to His will. Can we say that our prayer is capable of piercing the clouds, because we pray in faith, with humility and perseverance?

