Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Gospel text (*Lk* 19:1-10): At that time, Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house."

And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

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Today, it looks as if the Evangelic narrative was the accomplishment of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (cf. Lk 18:9-14). Humbly and sincerely, the tax collector was praying from the bottom of his heart: “O God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk 18:13); and, today, we contemplate how Jesus Christ honors Zaccheus' repentance by forgiving him, the Jericho chief tax collector, a wealthy and influent man, though hated and underrated by his neighbors, who felt bled by him: "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house" (Lk 19:5). The divine forgiveness provokes the conversion of Zaccheus; this is one of the originalities of the Gospel: God's forgiveness is free; it is not that God forgives us because of our conversion, but the other way round: God's mercy impels us to feel grateful and reciprocate accordingly.

As Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem, passes through Jericho, Jesus passes through our life, today and every day, and calls us by name. Zaccheus had never seen Jesus before, but he had heard of him and was curious to know more about such a famous master. Jesus, instead, did know Zaccheus and the miseries of

his life. Jesus was aware of the fact Zaccheus had enriched himself through the injury of others and was, therefore, hated and rejected by his fellow citizens; this is why He passed through Jericho, to rescue him from that well: “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.” (Lk 19:10).

The encounter between the Master and the tax collector totally changed the latter's life. After having listened to this Gospel, ponder over the opportunity God is offering you, which you cannot ignore: Jesus Christ passes through your life and calls you by name, because He loves you and He wants to save you. Which well did you fall in? As Zaccheus climbed up that tree to see Jesus better, you can now climb up to the Cross along with Jesus and you will know who He is, you will know the immensity of His love, inasmuch as if “The chief among the Publicans is here fitly introduced: For who will hereafter despair of himself, now that he attains to grace who gained his living by fraud” (St. Ambrose).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "With such alacrity, with such quickness of spirit, with such gladness and such spiritual rejoicing, as this man received our Lord into his house, our Lord give us the Grace to receive His Blessed Body and Blood, His Holy Soul and His Almighty Godhead" (St. Thomas More)

- "From that day forward in Zacchaeus’ house joy entered, peace entered, salvation entered and Jesus entered." (Francis)

- "During his public life Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them. A remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at his table..." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1443)