

The Son of Man came to seek and to save lost

Lectio Divina for the 31st Sunday in ordinary time C

Opening Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, Thank you for your generosity in giving us your Son Jesus the generous lover and giver of our life on earth and eternal life in heaven with you. He goes out continuously searching for us and offering us His infinite love through his words in the Holy Mass and the teaching of the church and through people and events although at times due to our limitations, we are unworthy and ignorant of his love. Continue to guide us as we are going to spend this moment for Lectio Divina so that we may be able to transform our lives and bear fruits in your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray- Amen.

First Reading: A reading from the book of wisdom 11:22-12:2

Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth. But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things; and you overlook people's sins that they may repent. For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you? But you spare all things, because they are yours, O LORD and lover of souls, for your imperishable spirit is in all things! Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little, warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing, that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD! (The word of the Lord/Thanks be to God)

Commentary: King Solomon is attempting to boost the Faith of his fellow Jews by answering the question, "Why doesn't God do away with evil men?" The answer is that, unlike men, God is benevolent toward all His creatures. God's love is a redemptive love through His mercy. He loves His creation, and because of this love He pardons and is patient with people who have gone astray, so that they may repent. What the Book of Wisdom tells us is that we could not even exist if we were not loved by God. Through His gifts of Faith and Love, He graciously calls each one of us.

Responsorial Psalm 145

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

I will extol you, O my God and King,
and I will bless your name forever and ever.

Every day will I bless you,
and I will praise your name forever and ever.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and of great kindness.

The LORD is good to all
and compassionate toward all his works.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,
and let your faithful ones bless you.
Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

The LORD is faithful in all his words
and holy in all his works.
The LORD lifts up all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

**Second Reading: A reading from the second letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians
1:11-2:2**

Brothers and sisters: We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ. We ask you, brothers and sisters, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling with him, not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or to be alarmed either by a "spirit," or by an oral statement, or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand. (The Word of the Lord/Thanks be to God).

Commentary: St. Paul's second letter to the Church in Thessalonica encourages the Thessalonians to persevere in their Christian Faith, giving glory to God without idly waiting for the "second coming" of Christ in their lifetime. This letter was intended to correct certain misunderstandings which had arisen in the community. Someone had brought to the believers at Thessalonica either a message or a letter alleged to be from Paul. The letter asserted that the Day of the Lord (the second coming of Jesus) had already occurred. Some people in the community reacted with terror, while others quit work, and were making nuisances of themselves as they awaited the full effect of the Lord's coming. The letter exhorts the Thessalonians and us, to glorify the Name of Jesus and to conduct ourselves in such a way as to become worthy of God's call by "relying on the power of God."

Gospel Reading: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke 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 Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ/Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ)

Meditation: Zacchaeus was in Jericho, a very wealthy and commercial town. It was one of the great tax centres of Palestine and its tax collectors were very rich. It is here in Jericho, Zacchaeus was living as a wealthy man since he was a chief tax collector. He was taking tax from the fellow Jews and paying the Roman government. The tax collectors collected an extra amounts of interest in addition to the taxes fixed by Rome. Hence the tax collectors were despised by their own town people. Since Zacchaeus had reached the top of his profession, he was the most hated man in the district, considered by the other Jews as a traitor, a thief and an outcast. Although he was rich, he was not happy. He felt emptiness in his life and that is why he was looking for an opportunity to see Jesus who could forgive his sins.

It was Passover time during which thousands of Jewish pilgrims were coming down from Galilee to Jerusalem by way of Jericho. Jesus was a very devout Jew and he also went for the Passover celebration. Since Zachaeus had heard that Jesus welcomed tax-collectors and sinners as his friends, he also wanted to be accepted him. Since he was very short in stature, he climbed up a tree to get a clear vision of Jesus and also to avoid the crowd. Jesus noticed him, and asked him to come down from the tree and take him to his house. They went off together, the sinner and the Son of God. A mere glance and a few words of Jesus changed this man from his sinful life and he experienced the gifts of Grace and Justification.

By entering Zacchaeus' house, Jesus gave him back the dignity that he had lost in the society. Jesus gave him a new life. He had a new direction for his life. The greedy and selfish Zacheaus started becoming a selfless person. Confirming the integrity of Zacchaeus' conversion and affirming the quality of his faith, Jesus announced that salvation had not come to zacchaeus alone, but rather to his entire household. The story of the conversion of Zacchaeus ends with Jesus' declaration, "the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." This man, who had previously been an outcast, is now addressed by Jesus as a "son of Abraham." Zacchaeus reminds us that Jesus continues to call the strangest people from the strangest places.

What is our Lord's message for us this week?

Awareness of our sinfulness: Jesus takes the initiative of knocking at the door of our souls, asking for entry. We have one thing in common with Zacchaeus: like him, we are all sinners, and we all need salvation. To refuse to admit that we are sinners is a fundamental impediment to the working of the mercy and grace of God in our hearts. A second, more common impediment is to refuse to listen to the call to repentance, which God so frequently sends out to us. We are all sinners to a greater or lesser degree. Jesus is inviting each one of us to total conversion by means of this Gospel lesson.

We need to love others as Jesus loves us, in spite of our sins. Jesus loved Zacchaeus—the greatest of sinners—and by that love Zacchaeus was transformed. Just as Jesus loved Zacchaeus, even though he was the worst of sinners, and loves us the same way, so we must love others in spite of their sin. Jesus expects this of us, so he offers us the strength and grace to do it.

We are called to generosity: Zacchaeus was changed from being greedy to being generous, from selfishness to selflessness. There was a change deep within his heart. Jesus wants us to move from our small and feeble Faith to a greater and more powerful Faith. God wants us to be financially and spiritually generous.

Are you a Dead Sea or a Galilean Sea? The Sea of Galilee is just north of the Dead Sea. Both the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea receive their water from the river Jordan. And yet, they are very, very different. Unlike the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee is pretty, resplendent with rich, colorful marine life. There are lots of plants. And fish too. In fact, the sea of Galilee is home to over twenty different types of fish. Same region, same source of water; and yet, while one sea is full of life, the other is dead! How come? Here's the reason. The River Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee and then flows out. The water simply passes through the Sea of Galilee—just in and out—and that keeps the Sea healthy and vibrant, teeming with marine life. But the Dead Sea is so far below the mean sea level, that it has no outlet. Here, the water flows in from the river Jordan, but does not flow out. There are no outlet streams. The water continuously evaporates from the dead sea all day, just leaving it with high salt content; and this makes it unfit for any marine life. Life Lesson from the Dead Sea is this: The Dead Sea takes the same water from river Jordan as the Sea of Galilee; and just holds it. It does not give; and hence, there is no life there at all. Life is not just about receiving. It is about receiving and giving.

Concluding Prayer for the Bible Study and Lectio Divina: Lord Jesus, Thank you for this evening and the time to be with our spiritual family. As you reached out to Zacchaeus, you reach out to us every day in the holy mass and in the holy scriptures. Bless us that we may be able to receive you joyfully in our homes and in our hearts. Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. May the things that you have revealed in our Bible study and the thoughts that we have shared in the Lectio Divina dwell in our hearts and stir us to action in the days to come. Help us to share your love with everyone that we encounter this week. May we lavish your abounding goodness upon our families, friends and colleagues. May we be your hands and feet to the needy and homeless, source of comfort and encouragement to the oppressed and the lonely. Give us a serene and restful sleep. (Hail Mary/ Blessing)