

Homily 31st Sunday in Ordinary time, year C

Benjamin Franklin, an inventor, met one day a lady tagging along her young son. She asked him: “Why is it that the riches of the world bring unhappiness?” He didn’t answer her. He got instead an apple from a basket and gave it to the boy. The little boy was very happy and ate the apple immediately. Franklin gave another...then another one...until both hands of the boy had three apples. Since he could not hold them all, an apple eventually fell to the ground. The boy cried loudly. Franklin then said to the mother “You see when the boy had two apples that he could comfortably carry, he was happy. But look, when he had one too many that one of them dropped, he is sad and crying. So also with wealth...”

Zaccheus was a wealthy man but he was lonely. He had everything but he was not happy. He was at the top of his profession but he was despised by his fellowmen.

The parents of Zaccheus named him Zaccheus and names for the Jews have meaning that would correspond to one’s personality. The name Zaccheus means “just” or “clean.” Yet when people in Jericho heard the name Zaccheus, they did not think of a just man or a Mr. Clean Guy but a detestable and dishonest man. It is because tax collectors were despised and treated as outcasts, no doubt because they accumulated great wealth at the expense of others. Zaccheus was a chief tax collector and was much hated by all the people. Chances of Zaccheus

entering God's kingdom were minimal. No self-respecting Jew would endorse his application.

Yet Jesus in today's gospel singled out Zaccheus for the honor of staying at his home. Jesus said to Zaccheus: "Zaccheus hurry down; for I must stay at your house today," (v. 5). Imagine Jesus is saying to you: "I must stay at your house today." How would you react to such an invitation? Would you be excited or embarrassed? Would your home be ready? Would you be personally ready to welcome Jesus in your home?

Why would Jesus single him out? It is because Zaccheus needed God's merciful love and forgiveness and in his encounter with Jesus he found more than he imagined possible. He shows the depth of his repentance by deciding to give half of his goods to the poor and to uses the other half for making restitution for fraud. This shows how radical his conversion was and coupled with restitution. Just like in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, after we have confessed all our sins to a priest, the priest would advise us to return what we have taken, restore the dignity of others that we have destroyed and many more. Then he gives the penitential works to restore what we have destroyed.

Not only that, we have another reason why Jesus singled out Zaccheus. It is because in the entire life of Zaccheus he is always looking down for money and business. His focus is on the profit and worldly pleasure. But he was asked to rise up and look that

the love and forgiveness of God is vast and he has the opportunity to change himself for the better. When he was at the top of the sycamore tree, Jesus asked him to go down. It means that we should not be always at the top and feel the heaven but let us go down and continue doing the mission that Jesus has given to us. It is because there are people who keep distance from Jesus. They call themselves Christians but they do not get involved. They are in the tree observing all that is going on in the Church. They are liberal with their comments, generous with their recommendations and always ready with advice but they will stay there at a safe distance, looking down from a sheltered observation post. To answer the call of Jesus means to come down from our position as observer. We cannot be spectators, we have to join the community and participate in its activities. We have to let Jesus enter the inner sanctuary of our personal life.

Zaccheus lost his wealth but found honor. He lost his belongings but found happiness. He lost his comforts but found his dignity. It is this dignity as a child of God who was saved by Christ that made him find his destiny.

As we continue with the celebration of the Holy Mass, let us pray for those who do not have the indwelling of the Lord God in their homes. Let us ask the Lord to reach out to these souls so that they too may partake in the universal salvation plan of God.