

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
Wisdom 11: 22 – 12: 2
Psalm 145: 1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14
2 Thessalonians 1: 11 – 2: 2
Luke 19: 1-10
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There is something in the human heart that delights in tiny, carefully crafted things. For many people, a toy soldier painted in exquisite detail in the colors of a particular Napoleonic regiment, or a dollhouse Chippendale desk with real marquetry and drawers that open and close, possess a charm that endures long after other childhood fascinations have been outgrown. In art, we might feel something like incredulous awe when we encounter a landscape painting inscribed on a single grain of rice. Science and technology may have given this artistic instinct its ultimate expression, employing scanning tunneling microscopes to draw pictures by the careful arrangement of individual carbon atoms.

Our first reading from The Book of Wisdom affords us a spiritual analogue of this sort of awe. We read, “Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance or a drop of dew come down upon the earth.” So, to God, the hundreds of billions of galaxies in the universe, taken together in their entirety, are like a grain of sand. As the passage continues, we discover that, even more extraordinarily, God loves and cares for everyone and everything in the universe. And, at least as regards human beings, God gives expression to that care, not merely by painting in broad strokes, by establishing beneficent laws by which the universe operates, no, God tends to us as individuals. And even God’s

treatment of us as individuals is finely detailed. We read: “You spare all things because they are yours...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.” So, God takes infinite pains with each of us, motivated by infinite love.

Our reading from the Gospel of Luke gives us a concrete instance of this theology in action. In the process, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, displays a strong family resemblance to his Heavenly Father. Jesus is passing through the town of Jericho. Doubtless, a number of people are travelling with him, and others have gathered to watch him go by. In any case, there’s a large crowd. At least you or I would have seen them as a crowd. In light of our first reading, we may conclude that Our Lord would see them, not en masse, but as individuals, each of them deeply beloved. He would have a saving plan for each of them. He would be prepared to gently and deftly guide each of them beyond sin and death into faith and hope and love. And as it happens, we are privileged to see Jesus do just that with one of them: Zacchaeus, who has climbed a tree to get a better look at him.

Others see Zacchaeus in terms of categories and labels. He is a rich man, a chief tax collector, a public sinner. With eyes of infinite love, Our Lord sees him as a person – a man who is, at this moment, teetering on the brink of a profound conversion. He says just the right thing to prompt Zacchaeus to make the leap: “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” Here we see in action the God we heard described in the Book of Wisdom.

We need to trust that the Creator God for whom the whole universe is like a drop of dew, loves and cares for each one of us every bit as much

as Zacchaeus. God knows our sinfulness better than we do, but also knows better than we the glorious creatures that we can be – that we are intended to be – in Christ. We are bits of clay in the hands of the consummate artist. Let's pray we have the grace to yield to the artist's hands.