

REACHING THE TURNING POINT IN OUR LIVES

(Being Homily for the 31st Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C)

By

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THE STORY

Once upon a time, Oprah Winfrey had an interview in her popular show with Madonna who is a singer and actress. This interview happened when Madonna was about to become a Mother. Madonna made an inspiring statement which is still relevant today. She said: *“There were many years when I thought that fame, fortune, and public approval would bring me happiness. But one day I woke up and realized they don’t. I will say Motherhood is what ultimately inspired me to seek out the more meaningful things in my life. The turning point of my life was when I was about to become a Mother. I wanted to understand what I would teach my daughter, and I didn’t know where I stood on things. I wanted to know the meaning of true lasting happiness and how I could go about finding it.”*

Things assume a new meaning when we reach a turning point in our life. We may ask the question: What is the turning point of your life? Zacchaeus the tax collector, in the Gospel of today, reached a turning point of his life when he encountered Jesus.

THE READINGS

This explains why the common theme of today’s readings is about the benevolent, compassionate, forgiving mercy of God for us sinners and the response of repentance and conversion that is expected from us.

In the first reading taken from the Book of Wisdom, we are reminded of God’s Almighty Power which includes His strength to be merciful. God, patiently waits for us sinners to repent. He continues to love us, even when we do not love Him in return. The reading focuses on the love God has for all He has created, the love that overlooks sin so that we all have time for repentance.

In the Responsorial Psalm taking from (Ps 145), the Psalmist also tells us that the Lord is good to all, and His compassion covers all that He has made. *The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness (Ps 145:8).*

In the second reading, St. Paul 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. He advises them to continue to live good Christian lives every day, allowing God to work in them so that they may be worthy of their vocation as Christians.

In the Gospel, we are presented with the story of the instantaneous conversion of Zacchaeus the tax collector, who was led by God’s grace to a moment of conversion. The Gospel describes how Jesus recognized Zacchaeus for exactly what he was, a lost sinner in need of salvation. God’s grace worked in Zacchaeus to lead him from idle curiosity to repentance, conversion and restitution. The story emphasizes the fact that Zacchaeus conversion came as a result of his receiving the love and acceptance offered to him by a merciful God.

LESSONS FROM THE READINGS

- 1) **The need for us to accept God’s Divine invitation:** In the Gospel of today, we see the surprise in Zacchaeus eyes when Jesus said to him: *“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”* That was the turning point in Zacchaeus life. How wonderful it is for us to hear such wonderful words of invitation from Jesus. Yet at every Mass and in the sacraments that we attend, God continue to make his invitation known to us. Sometimes, his invitation comes to us through our neighbors and through the challenges of life that we pass through. But at many other times, it comes through the Scriptures when God wishes to enter into our lives. That why He says to us in the Book of Revelation 3:20: *“I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house and eat with him and he will eat with me.”* But the question we need to ask ourselves is this: Is our door always open and ready to accept the invitation of God? Today Jesus is inviting each one of us to full repentance and conversion of heart. We must remember that He still loves us in spite of our ugly past, our broken promises, our lack of prayer and Faith, our resentments and lusts. We must therefore admit of our sinfulness and accept God’s call to repentance, conversion and renewal of life. That way, we have accepted his divine invitation for us.

- 2) **We can only accept God's invitation if we have the desire to see Jesus:** Zacchaeus in the Gospel today wanted to see Jesus. This was borne out of a genuine desire to see Jesus or probably out of curiosity to see the one he had heard so many stories about. We are also told that Zacchaeus had a small stature. Again, because of the crowd surrounding Jesus, it was difficult for him to see Jesus. However, he made a serious effort to climb a tree in order to have a glimpse of Jesus. He did not allow the crowd and what they think be an obstacle for him to see Jesus. The lesson here is very simple! To see Jesus clearly, we must be ready to get away from the crowd and risk being different, as well as risk losing our dignity. In life, there are so many obstacles preventing us from seeing Christ. If we make frantic efforts as Zacchaeus did, Christ will undoubtedly notice us and show us his loving mercy. Therefore, we must rise above all the obstacles that is preventing us from seeing Christ and receiving his mercy. That is why Saint Paul advised Timothy thus, *"Do not allow anyone to look down on you because you are young"* (1 Tim 4:12).
- 3) **We need a moment of encounter with Jesus to change our lives for the better:** When Zacchaeus met with Jesus he had this to say: *"Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."* This implies that Zacchaeus, because of his encounter with Jesus, has undergone a radical conversion. He gave up his corrupt and rapacious ways of life. He was determined to share his wealth with the poor and was ready to make restitution to those he has cheated. Any encounter with God becomes a turning point to change our lives for the better. We need a divine encounter like Zacchaeus.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this homily, I will like us to know that God has not finished with us. When we feel so worthless and think that God can never do anything again with our life, let us remember that there were many personalities in the Scriptures who felt this same way and God still used them to achieve greatness. Noah was a drunk, Abraham was too old when he had his child, Isaac was a day-dreamer, Jacob was a liar, Joseph was abused, Moses had a stuttering problem, Gideon was a coward, Sampson was a womanizer, Rahab was a prostitute, Jeremiah and Timothy were too young, David had an affair and became a murderer, Elijah was deeply depressed, Isaiah preached was frustrated in his mission, Jonah ran away from God, Naomi lost both her husband and her two sons to death and her daughter-in-law Ruth was a foreigner, not a Jew. Job went bankrupt, John the Baptist ate locusts,

Peter denied Christ three times, Saul was a murderer before he converted and became Paul; Martha was worried about everything, Mary her sister was extravagant, the Samaritan woman who eventually met Jesus was divorced more than once, Timothy had an ulcer...and Zacchaeus was too small in stature. We have no more excuses about ourselves. God can use us to our full potential. Therefore, the story of Zacchaeus is a good indication that the merciful God has come to seek and save us. Irrespective of all human obstacles, the courage, and humility of Zacchaeus attracted the attention and mercy of Christ to him. He refused to be limited by the crowd or allowed his shortcoming to hinder his salvation. He saw mercy and redemption and immediately took advantage of them. We can do the same.