

*“Today, salvation has come to this house”.*

Salvation. What does this mean to you?

During November; the last month of the Liturgical year, Holy Mother Church encourages us through her Liturgies and Scriptural readings to contemplate the Four Last things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell.

This is the beauty of the rhythm and order of Catholic Liturgical Life. As we near the end of our Church year prior to a new one and the Holy Season of Advent we are offered this gift of looking ahead to the end of our human life. This isn't macabre, or morbid in the spiritual sense at all. It is a necessary spiritual exercise because it provides the faithful Catholic direction on how to live our lives. Death and life are intrinsically linked to one another.

The Catechism teaches us that “believing in Jesus Christ and the one who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation”. *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life* as we heard in the Gospel acclamation; words of hope from Our Blessed Lord, who spoke much more about eternal life than death.

That is because death had no claim on him. He didn't fear it. He was eternally alive! Everything about his life reached into eternity, had eternal consequences, culminating in the conquering of death itself through his passion, death and resurrection. His merits alone open to us the gates of heaven which is a hope, not a guarantee for us. But if we strive to fully possess Christ in this life, or allow Christ to fully possess us, our lives too will reach into eternity, now and at the hour of our death.

Picture yourself in this Gospel scene and the salvific interaction between Our Blessed Lord and Zacchaeus, a tax collector, the most despised occupation to the Jews. Tax collectors were Roman puppets, given license to extort for themselves whatever they could above the Roman assessment. The Jews hated them, not only because of their consort with the occupying Romans but they stole from their own people, an abomination to God's law! Grumbling would have been an understandable response to Jesus' warm embrace of such a sinner.

Despite Zacchaeus outward sinfulness, deep within was a desire for something better, witnessed by his determination to overcome any physical obstacles to encountering Our Blessed Lord. God created us all with a natural desire to seek him. He is the Lover who seeks us, his beloved and loves us whether we desire him or not. But as with Zacchaeus he awaits to see our desire, our being open to fully receiving him before fully giving us himself.

And that is what happened. And Zacchaeus responds to Christ's love and mercy with heroic charity. Giving half his possessions to the poor wasn't the prescription of the Law. He didn't need to do this. God's love is designed to be received and then magnified into love of neighbor, especially to those in most need of it.

And his repentance is heroic too. What he did was much more than a simple penance for his sins. Think about it, how could possibly repay four times what he had stolen? What he does is empty himself so that God becomes his desire, radically turning everything over to him. He becomes, in the words of St. Paul, a new man, leaving behind the old one.

Zacchaeus is a model of conversion. His name in Hebrew means "pure, just". But he sure lost his way in living up to it. St. Gregory the Great wrote that his desire for Christ prompted an outpouring of "extraordinary grace and righteousness. Zacchaeus believed, repented, was justified and then sanctified. And if he persevered in it, he shall have gained eternal glory".

Well, after the death and resurrection of Christ Zacchaeus became an associate of St. Peter, who ordained him the Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine. Christ took the worst sinner and endowed him with extraordinary grace for a life of heroic virtue, and because he persevered until death crowned him a Saint. We celebrate his Memorial on August 20. Salvation came to his house that day, and at the end of his life.

"Learn here Zacchaeus' inner desire for Christ, and how Our Blessed Lord fulfilled that desire with himself" said St. Bede. Does Our Blessed Lord see that desire in us?

Brothers and Sisters, what does salvation mean to you? How MUCH does it mean to you? Do you know where you are going? Do you truly desire Christ the way, the truth and the life who will take you there? Have you lost your way, or lost sight of Christ? What sin of the past or present is crowding out Christ's saving power? What is blurring your beatific vision? What virtue is needed to more closely imitate the life of Our Blessed Lord that you are called? What are you lacking in faith, hope and love of Jesus Christ that prevents you from being completely possessed by him so that your life reaches into eternity now to glory in it later?

We are all sinners. We are all broken and in need of daily conversion. We all need a Savior, but we have one, and he desires us! What else do we need? What wound does the Divine Physician need to heal? How are we denying him from fully possessing us and radically transforming us with extraordinary grace and righteousness in this life in order to reign with him and all the Saints in the next?

St. Ann Parish was dedicated and consecrated to the Church's mission of the salvation of the world, as are the hands of our Priest to absolve sin and confect the Eucharist during Holy

Mass—THE Holy action that sanctifies the world so we may fully and intimately possess the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Today, salvation HAS come to this house. How about you, and yours?

St. Zacchaeus, pray for us!