

Homily: 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday: Cycle C: 2016: Wis 11: 22- 12: 2; Ps 145; 2 Thes 1: 11- 2:2; Lk 19:  
1-10

“Our Response to God’s Love”

1. **How the Lord loves us: both collectively, as a race of human beings made in His image, and individually as unique persons!** It has been said before by many of the saints, but is worth repeating over and over again: **if you or I were the only person on earth, Jesus would have come down to save us - from the power of satan, sin and death!** The God of the universe loves us that much!!! Why? Well, that is truly a mystery of the nature of pure love, which God is - a love that desires to give of itself and invite others to share in its joy! In comparison to the majesty of the Triune God, as we hear in the Book of Wisdom today, *“the whole universe is as a grain from a balance or a drop of the morning dew come down upon the earth.”* Nothing at all in comparison to the splendor of God, but God still loves His creation, particularly the human race. God’s love and Providential care for the human race is truly amazing.
2. The **book of Wisdom** goes on to say, *“But you (the Lord) have mercy on all, because you can do all things; and you overlook people’s sins that they may repent.”* **God does not overlook sins because He is weak or doesn’t care, but rather because He wants all people to freely come to embrace the fullness of His love and truth - to choose to turn their lives toward Him. He is patient because He wants all to be saved,** as St. Peter says in his second letter in the New Testament (chapter 3: 8-10): *“This point must not be overlooked, dear friends. In the Lord’s eyes, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years are as a day. The Lord does not delay in keeping His promise - though some consider it “delay.” Rather, He shows you generous patience, since He wants none to perish but all to come to repentance. The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and on that day the heavens will vanish with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and all its deeds will be made manifest.”* **Our response** to this truth of God’s patience and mercy should be one of humility and awe: **God is SO GOOD!** **We need to respond to the Lord’s call to salvation wholeheartedly, in**

love. **Remember all human beings were created for love:** to give love and receive love in return. But **this love must be God's version of love** - which is based on **truth** and **self-gift**; not the **counterfeit versions of love** that the world, the evil one, and our fallen nature settles for - which in reality is **selfishness of various forms** wrapped up in the guise of what is called "love", which in reality is actual lust. See the life of St. Margaret of Cortona. Very powerful!

3. That leads to the final point today which is: **how do we know if we are responding to the Lord's invitation of love with love in kind?** Well **the true test** is: are undergoing ongoing repentance and spiritual conversion in our lives, in all honesty? This is where the example of the tax collector **Zacchaeus** comes in. **Our response to God's patience and mercy is seen in the fruit of our lives:** *repentance from sin of various sorts (do we know what actions and inactions are objectively sinful? If not, we need to start there! - see the Catechism of the Catholic Church section on morality) and then concrete change which is manifested in a real purpose of amendment. Isn't this what we promise to God every time we go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Do we realize this?* Or do we say, kind of like the Pharisee in last week-end's Gospel: *I don't need to change, I don't need to go to Confession, I'm a good person, i.e., I don't kill anybody - (☺);* of course there is much more to living in union with God than minimalistic morality! **Zacchaeus today responded to Jesus' call to love**, which was initiated by Jesus (*God always takes the initiative to draw us to His heart*) wanting to visit his home (*symbolic of visiting our hearts*), **by promising Christ that he is going to change his life (he was open-minded and open-hearted to God's grace and willing to admit he was a sinner in need of redemption, both of which are key to any real conversion)** - in this case by giving away half his possessions and making restitution four-fold for any sins of extortion. **This is a radical response of love.** Have we done the same in our life? Yes, living all the teachings of Christ and His Catholic Church is hard on a human level at first, especially in the moral area, but as God's grace heals us over time we come to see that sin never makes us truly happy, but only promises a false joy that ends in

emptiness. As St. Augustine famously put it in his **Confessions**, “*Our hearts were made by you O’ Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*” So true! So true! Remember again according to **the Book of Wisdom** today: “*You (the Lord) rebuke offenders (sinners) 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.*” **What a consoling thought! How patient God is with us!** And what Jesus says today at the end of the Gospel passage should give us all hope, “*For the Son of Man has come to seek and save what was lost.*” **He wants to save us, despite our sins, however grave they are,** but we have to be willing to repent, to change, and make amends for our past sins: *through prayers, deeds of mercy and acts of penance*. Remember according to St. Paul, *where sin has abounded grace abounds all the more; and eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it dawned on the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him!* Jesus is waiting for our response. What will it be? God bless you.