

31<sup>st</sup> Sunday per Annum - C  
Wisdom 11:22-12:2;  
II Thessalonians 1:11-2:2;  
Luke 19:1-10  
Little Flower - 11/3/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading from the Book of Wisdom is a beautiful reading. To use the title of a song, "Our God is an Awesome God."

One of the ways in which God reveals himself to us is through the natural world. For example, when we look at the sky at night and see the distant stars, we get a glimpse of the immensity of the universe. This reveals something of the immensity of God. On the other hand, the first verse of today's reading from Wisdom reminds us that "*Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance, or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.*"

The beauty of the passage is in its proclamation that God as creator loves all of creation but especially loves us. According to the author of Wisdom, God is "*the lover of souls.*" The truth that we can hardly comprehend is that God for whom the universe is as small as a grain or a drop of dew knows us and loves us individually, personally. God knows and calls each of us by name. God knows each of us intimately and loves us unconditionally. God's love for us, in fact, is the anchor of lives. No matter what, God never loves us any more or any less.

Why does God love us so much? The author of Wisdom reminds us that God's imperishable spirit is in all things. It is for this reason that we are immortal: we were created in the image and likeness of God. Also, it suggests that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. St. Augustine wrote something to the effect, "There is within me one who is closer to me than I am to myself" (cf. *Confessions*, III, 6, 11).

According to the Book of Wisdom, the proof of God's unconditional love for us is not only our continued life but our continued existence. I often ask children what would happen if God ceased to love us for even an instant. Most answer that we would die. I respond that we would not die. We would simply cease to exist. We would go poof. It would be as though we never lived, never existed.

Paradoxically, this passage ties God's mercy to his power: *But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things.*" It is interesting that the alternate opening prayer of one of the Masses in the former Sacramentary began, "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in your unbounded mercy you have revealed the beauty of your power through your constant forgiveness of our sins."

Of course, God's love was individualized in Jesus Christ. Today's Gospel exemplifies Jesus' love for one individual, Zacchaeus, a tax collector. Zacchaeus was not only a tax collector but the chief tax collector and a wealthy man. As I mentioned last Sunday, tax collectors were automatically classified as sinners. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, but Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus. That moment of outreach melted Zacchaeus' heart and changed his life: he promised to give half his possessions to the poor and to repay anyone from whom he had extorted anything four times over.

My brothers and sisters, Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians reminds us that God's love is transformative. If we allow ourselves to be loved by God, to be loved by Jesus, our lives will be changed. So many people's problems are caused because they feel unloved or because they believe they are unworthy of love. Just as God's love was incarnate in Jesus, so Jesus wants his love to be incarnate in us. If we love others, we have the possibility of transforming their lives.