

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Wisdom 11:22-12:2

This beautiful poetry was written less than 50 years before the appearance of Jesus on the earth. It helps to dispel the notion that the “old” testament revealed a god of vengeance and the “new” testament revealed a god of mercy. Such a mistaken view of our tradition is explained only by a selective and arbitrary choice of texts. The truth is that the God of Genesis who pronounced all creation “good” is the same God of Wisdom who “loves all things that are” and who, according to the beloved disciple, John, “so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son.”²

22Before the Lord the whole universe is as a grain from a balance or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.

23But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things; God’s mercy is an extension of his creative power.³ God is the master of history, governing hearts and events in keeping with his will.⁶ (CCC 269) **and you overlook people’s sins that they may repent.** Repent means to turn around, to have a change of heart, of mind, of intention, of disposition, of attitude. One turns toward Yahweh and away from sin and evil. It means conversion and sorrow for sins.⁴ God’s mercy does NOT aim at excusing or condoning sin.¹

24For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; God does not retract his love from anything!⁵ **for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.** Only love can explain God’s having created and preserved all things.³ God calls man and woman, made in the image of the Creator “who loves everything that exists,” to share in his providence toward other creatures; hence their responsibility for the world God has entrusted to them.⁶ (CCC 373)

25And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you? These rhetorical questions are inspired by wonder, uttered in praise, and offered in gratitude. They are thus a model of prayer.² God does not abandon his creatures. Recognizing our utter dependence on our Creator is a source of wisdom.⁶ (CCC 301) Equipped with this wisdom we readily obey divine inspirations.⁶ (CCC 1831) Nowhere else in the OT is there so forceful an expression of God’s love for all things or a reason given for it.³

26But you spare all things, because they are yours, O Lord and lover of souls,

12:1for your imperishable spirit is in all things! The breath of life is put in creatures by God.³

2Therefore 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! The road to eternal happiness passes through the rejection of evil. God warns the man of good faith by awakening his conscience concerning what is good and what is evil. The just man very quickly realizes that he must rid himself of evil, that is, he must repent.⁵

2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2

This is one of Paul’s first letters. It was written about 20 years after the death of Christ.¹ Christian teaching on the end of the world and the last things is the subject which receives most attention in this letter. In the first letter to the Thessalonians, some of the things Paul said were misinterpreted by some as meaning that the Second Coming of the Lord was imminent. This made quite a few people restless, causing them to lose their common sense. However, Paul never meant to say that the Parousia was going to happen soon or that he himself

would live to see the day. Paul then wrote the second letter to make it clear that the Second Coming was not imminent.⁷ It is essential to get this doctrine right, for it is close to center stage in the Christian gospel. It is mentioned no less than 318 times in the New Testament!¹²

Brothers and sisters:

11 We always pray for you, St. Augustine observed that anyone who wants to teach the word of God should be convinced that good results will be due more to the piety of his prayers than to his gifts of speech. Consequently, he should be more of a supplicant than a speaker.⁷ **that our God may make you worthy of his calling** This is the call from paganism to Christianity. Perseverance in this vocation must be sought for as a gift.³ **and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith,** No supernatural action can be planned, begun or brought to a conclusion without the grace of God. The morning prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours for Monday Week 1 says: “Lord, be the beginning and end of all that we do and say. Prompt our actions with your grace, and complete them with your all-powerful help.”⁷

12 that the name of our Lord Jesus The very person of Christ. In the ancient East the use of the name called forth the effective power of the person.³ **may be glorified in you, and you in him, in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ.**

2:1 We ask you, brothers and sisters, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling with him, The main theme of the letter is given here — the timing of the Second Coming of the Lord.⁷ This return of Christ will be to judge the living and the dead and the “assembling” refers to the believers being taken up with the Lord into heavenly glory.¹⁵

2 not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, Something has shaken the peace of mind of the Thessalonians so that they are in a perturbed state. There are three possible causes: **or to be alarmed either by a “spirit,”** This may refer to a charismatic gift of prophecy by people spreading their own ideas as if they came from God.⁷ **or by an oral statement,** This may have referred to a charismatic discourse of wisdom or knowledge.³ **or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand.** Here he refers to a letter falsely attributed to him. Paul took efforts in 3:17 to authenticate this letter.³ Prophecies said to be uttered under the influence of the Spirit, sayings ascribed to the Lord or to other important figures, and letter forgeries were common problems to early Christians. The development of the New Testament itself was, in part, an attempt to fulfill this need for a rule, a canon, by which the reliability of claims could be measured.⁸ The Catechism clarifies that throughout the ages including our own times, there have been “private” revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. Christian faith CANNOT accept “revelations” that claim to SURPASS or CORRECT the Revelation of which Christ is the fulfillment.⁶ (CCC 67) The Catechism also mentions that before Christ’s Second Coming, the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the “mystery of iniquity” in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist.⁶ (CCC 675)

Luke 19:1-10

Once again Jesus addresses himself to a covenant outsider; Zacchaeus, a tax collector in Jericho. The Jericho region was a very wealthy one and the chief tax collector for the Romans could have done extremely well for

himself, even after employing other tax collecting agents to do the dirty work of extortion of the local people and collaboration with the Roman authorities which made these men outcasts in Jewish society. His small stature would have made it a necessity to employ others to handle the rough stuff which is likely to have made him all the more hated by the local populace.¹

1At that time, Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town.

2Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector Possibly the head of a taxing district in charge of other collectors. Most tax collectors were suspected or dishonesty and despised as sinners.⁹ In the eyes of the Jews, he bore the responsibility for the dishonesty connected with the activity of all his field workers.¹⁰ and also a wealthy man, The legal collection of taxes in Roman-occupied Judea, to say nothing of illegal collection, amounted to little more than an extortion racket backed by the credible threat of violence, perhaps even crucifixion. We can only imagine how the citizens of Jericho must have loathed this little man!¹⁴

3was seeking to see who Jesus was, but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature.

4So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree The sycamore tree has a short trunk and wide lateral branches which make it easy to climb.³ in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way.

5When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” This story is marked with irony, since Zacchaeus sought with great effort to see Jesus, only to discover that Jesus was seeking him!⁹ Jesus was open to healing a person’s heart no matter what their station in life. He wanted the people to love the sinner and hate the sin, but not hate the sinner as well as the sin.¹³

6And he came down quickly and received him with joy. Jesus chooses this evildoer and covenant outsider and thereby fills us with hope. In the words of St. Ambrose: “He chooses a chief tax collector: who can despair when such a man obtains grace?”¹¹

7When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, “He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.” Over and over we see Jesus preferring the company of repentant sinners. This breach of decorum is even worse than usual because Jesus does not wait to be invited to the tax collector’s house. He invites himself!¹⁰ Oriental custom allowed people to enter freely and gather at the edge of a banquet. Although Jesus speaks to an individual, we sense a large group of disciples hovering in the background.³

8But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, Zacchaeus does not argue, he repents! “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over.” Zacchaeus goes beyond the requirements of the Law of Moses in restitution!¹¹ The Catechism tells us that those who, directly or indirectly, have taken possession of the goods of another, are obliged to make restitution of them, or to return the equivalent in kind or in money if the goods have disappeared, as well as the profit or advantages their owner would have legitimately obtained from them. All those who have taken part in a theft: those who ordered it, assisted in it, or received the stolen goods, are obliged to make restitution in proportion to their responsibility and to their share of what was stolen.⁶ (CCC 2412)

9And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come Jesus makes no excuses for his behavior and in the next verse he explains that this is exactly why he has come—so seek out sinners.¹¹ To reject the Savior is to reject salvation just as acceptance of the Savior is acceptance of salvation. to this house The entire household shares Zacchaeus’ blessing as they had earlier suffered from his unjust

practices.³ because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. To be a son of Abraham means to have an absolute faith in God and to have an unshakable confidence in God.⁵ Israel proudly traced its ancestry to the patriarch and Zacchaeus showed himself a true descendant by his repentance and faith.⁹

10For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.” All riches and earthly goods, whether justly or unjustly acquired, tend to capture man’s heart and can be the occasion for committing an injustice to others. Salvation consists in rising to the level of the Kingdom where the heart is freed from the allurements of money and is thus enabled to adore God and to exercise a brotherly love.⁵

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst, (2) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (4) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (5) “Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings: Year C” by Achille Degeest, (6) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (7) “The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians And Pastoral Epistles,” (8) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 2 Thessalonians” by Ivan Havener, O.S.B. (9) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,” (10) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Luke” by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., (11) “The Navarre Bible: St. Luke”, (12) “You Can Understand The Bible” by Peter Kreeft, (13) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken e3 Marie Finn, (14) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2007” by James L. Weaver, and (15) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus” With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.