

**Father Brad Neely**  
**St. Mary's-Moscow—Oct 31, 2010**  
**31<sup>st</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time, Cycle C**  
**Wis 11: 22-12:2; 2Thess 1:11-22; Lk 19: 1-10**

Our dear friend, St. Luke,  
gives us yet another Gospel scene today  
with a “reversal of expectations.”  
We come across a pattern of “reverse expectations”  
in our recent Sunday Gospels.  
Last Sunday, Luke told us  
of the *tax collector* in the temple  
who was exalted by Jesus  
for his humble prayer,  
versus the Pharisee,  
who was really focused on “self-exaltation.”

In the Gospel today,  
we hear the story of Zacchaeus,  
who, as a tax collector,  
is also considered an outcast  
in the eyes of the people,  
and one who is *least likely*  
to receive God's favor.  
The fact that Zacchaeus is a wealthy man  
adds to the suspicion of possible dishonesty.  
Zacchaeus does not let his status as an outcast  
keep him from a desire to meet Jesus.

Jesus responds to his desire,  
and suggests that he be invited into his home.  
This is *not* what the bystanders *would expect* of Jesus:  
“*When that all saw this,*  
*they began to grumble, saying,*  
*‘He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.’”*  
And that is *exactly* the point.  
Jesus very purposely engages a sinner.  
This is a **reversal of expectations**.

Keeping this Gospel scene in mind,  
let's look back to our first reading  
from the Book of Wisdom.  
In this reading,  
we get a wonderful *foundation*  
for Jesus “seeking out a sinner.”

This passage from the Book of Wisdom  
*wisely* reminds us  
that God created everything that exists,  
and what God created, he found good.  
God found us good.  
At some point,

sin entered the world.  
As a result,  
all humanity inherited original sin,  
and a proclivity to sin.  
*Even though* we now have a proclivity to sin,  
***how could God possibly hate  
what he has created  
and found good?***  
Wisdom says:  
“*For you love all things that are,  
and loathe nothing that you have made;  
for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.*”  
“*But you spare all things,  
because they are yours.*”

God has made an effort  
throughout history,  
--because of His love for what He created--  
to “create anew what sin has destroyed.”  
For the sinner,  
God's “first reaction is to offer  
repentance and conversion.”  
Given that,  
how can we resist being attracted  
to a God whose greatness  
is surpassed only by the wish to forgive?

Now, returning to the Gospel,  
we see that Jesus  
is totally receptive to Zacchaeus,  
when the *expected* thing,  
was to assume his sinfulness  
and reject him as an outcast.  
Jesus *engages* him,  
and in that process,  
Zacchaeus becomes a new man in Christ's mercy.

When we are within the arms of Christ's mercy,  
isn't part of mercy, then, *patience*?  
Jesus in the Gospel is an example of *patience*,  
just as his heavenly Father is *patient*.  
The Father and the Son, through the Holy Spirit,  
wait for a person to *come freely*  
to repentance and conversion.  
This reminds me of a scripture verse  
from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter of Peter [3: 15]:  
“*Consider that our Lord's **patience**  
is directed toward salvation.*”

In today's Gospel scene,  
---and all the Gospels, for that matter---  
we understand that Jesus brings with him  
the possibility of being “*saved*” and “*set aside*”

for eternal divine life.  
To that end, --*salvation*,  
we must understand that with God's *mercy*,  
there is also God's *patience*.

If we consider the span  
of world history,  
and humanity falling into sin,  
we can see that God did not detach  
and simply set about *punishing*,  
as much as He set about *restoring* the world.  
There **IS** punishment for un-repentant sin,  
but God does everything possible  
not to leave us in a mire of sin.  
Only **WE** can leave ourselves in a mire of sin.

An approximate estimate  
of when sin entered the world  
would be at least 4 thousand years ago.  
In this huge span of time,  
God has *revealed* Himself to the world  
in a time and fashion  
that has called humanity to *repent*  
and be *converted*,  
for the cause of **our salvation**.  
4 thousand years. . . . .  
**Talk about patience.**

Talking about God's patience,  
what we often observe these days---  
typically on television---  
someone having had an experience  
with God's grace or mercy,  
and it is expressed as-----  
"There must be.....some.....higher power.....  
I don't know what it is....  
but there is definitely *something* out there ....."  
In 4 thousand years of revelation,  
there are still those who wonder  
"what it is,"  
much less "**Who** it is."

*Pause*  
We are talking here about God's patience.  
**God is patient.**  
**God waits---**  
and waits to the absolute end of our lives,  
always with hands extended.

We, as sinners,  
are all in need  
of the continual *repentance* and *conversion*,  
which is facilitated by God's mercy and patience.  
As in the Gospel today,

Christ engages **us**,  
never turning away,  
but always ready to say,  
as he did to Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree:  
"come down quickly,  
for today I must stay at your house."