

Diocesan Women's Retreat Closing Mass/31st Sunday Ordinary Time

Nov. 3, 2019 10:30 a.m. Indian Lake Nazarene Camp, Vicksburg

What a great time for a mini-retreat.....we've just celebrated the great Solemnities of All Saints/ All Souls, and better still, we all gained an hour's sleep last night!!! Besides that, this Season of Fall is conducive to being a time to reflect on whatever "changes" are taking place that shouldn't, or are not taking place that should.

The theme of your retreat has been Jesus' amazing invitation: "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" I think besides that being a beautiful invitation, it's also quite a challenge. I'm sure you've reflected well on that, and much more, over this time together.

As I see it, today's Readings are perfect as "follow up" to Jesus' invitation---to your reflections, and to whatever changes/adjustments you may intend to pursue in your spiritual lives and in your life responsibilities. I think these Readings are about "perspective"----seeing things from another "perspective"----from God's perspective.

Today's First Reading, from the Book of Wisdom helps us to think about what God, the Creator of All, thinks; what God sees---what His "perspective" is on the work of His creation. As we know, God created everything----and it's all good; there is nothing "bad" that God created, even when we might see it as "bad" or "dangerous". Even with something so marvelous as God's creative power, that same Almighty and All-powerful Creator God is also revealed as "*the Lover of Souls*"---that He loves us and overlooks our sins with the hope that we will repent!

Today's Psalm: "*I will praise You Lord, my King and my God!*", continues that theme of seeing God more clearly, as the One worthy of our praise.

Today's Gospel, of course, is the beloved story of the encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus. Remember who Zacchaeus was: he was hated/despised---he "stole his neighbors blind"----and on top of all that, worked on behalf of their oppressors, the Romans. He was probably not on anyone's Christmas card list! Yet, there was something inside him.....yearning to "*see who Jesus was*".

He had quite a dilemma: he was a public person, and he didn't want to be made fun of; and, as St. Luke tells us, he was "short", or what today we would call "vertically challenged". Yet he still wanted to get a better "perspective"! I

think Luke chose that word, “short”, purpose-fully. He was short-sighted; short/small-minded; short on patience; short on charity/compassion. He fell short of what makes the difference between a good person and a not so good person.

And then, there was Jesus’ perspective on all this. He came along, and purposely stopped under the very tree where Zacchaeus thought he was hiding and inconspicuous. When Jesus looked at him, what did He see? He certainly saw his limitations, his imperfections, his sins; but he also saw his potential. And that’s why He said: *“Hurry---come down here....I need to come to your house.”*

I think that could be a variation of the theme of your retreat: *“Come to Me, and I will give you rest.”* We know what Zacchaeus’ response was---a true conversion. He said: *“Half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor”; “If I have extorted anything from anyone, I shall repay it four times over.”*

So that was good, and amazing; but just imagine the “work” that Zacchaeus still needed to do to make good on those promises. He had made a good first step, but he would have a long way to go to complete his conversion process.

So, coming to Jesus, or allowing Jesus to come into our homes, is just the first step---an extremely important step, but a first step. It’s the ongoing work of growth in virtue, and the “changes” that we need to make. We need that ongoing Presence of Jesus---not just a one-time Encounter; an ongoing, deepening, passionate, relationship with Him. We need all the helps that Jesus gives us to make that happen: the regular reception of the Eucharist; daily Prayer; Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit!

I’m sure we want to come to Jesus, just like Zacchaeus really “wanted to see Jesus”. But, let’s not forget: Who is looking for whom? The deeper message of all of God’s Word is that God ---- the Creator of all---the “Lover of Souls”---is eternally looking for us, searching us out, inviting and challenging us to come to Him, to open ourselves to His Word---to His Love----to His Mercy!

No matter what we do, or how “small” our success is, or how “short” of good deeds we are, our Loving God will be so very pleased when we “hurry down” from wherever our hiding places are, and open ourselves to Him. When we open ourselves to Jesus, when we think we have found Him---that’s when we will realize that it is we who have been found. And things can never, will never, be the same again!

God bless you, now and always!