**THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF YEAR C**

**30th October 2022**

**Reading I: Wisdom 11:22-12:2**

This passage from the Book of Wisdom is a fine pre-Christian exposition of the universal nature of the divine mercy. It makes the point that God spares humankind because he loves them. In short, God's relationship with everything that he has created can only be one of love and mercy. It begins by asserting the insignificance of human beings in language reminiscent of Second Isaiah. (The author of Isaiah 40-55) Compare the phrases "grain of dust that tips the scales" and "a drop from a bucket" from Isaiah 40:15.

The striking phrase at the end of the first paragraph "you hold nothing of what you have made in abhorrence’ was used in the medieval rite for the blessing of ashes on Ash Wednesday. It so impressed Cranmer that he inserted it not only into his new collect for Ash Wednesday but also in the penitential office for that day and in one of the Good Friday collects.

The thought is that though human beings have made such an awful mess of God's creation, yet it still is God's creation. His immortal spirit still dwells in all things (12:1), and human beings can therefore plead with God not to allow his handiwork to be destroyed, just as a painter or sculptor could not bear to see the product of his or her genius devoured by fire or smashed to pieces.

Another unforgettable phrase follows in ‘the Lord, whose imperishable spirit is in all’ The author here concisely combines Hebrew and Greek ideas. RUACH was the Hebrew for Breath and therefore the Life of God. Sophia was the Greek for wisdom as perceived by mankind. Probably the author thinks fundamentally in biblical terms but easily slips into Hellenistic language to express authentically biblical thoughts.

The combination is seen again in John’s presentation of Jesus as the incarnate wisdom of God. (John 1;1-18) In the rest of the New Testament, however, the Spirit may not be found in all things and all persons but is a gift to those who believe in Christ Jesus.

**Responsorial Psalm: 144:1-2, 8-11, 13-14**

In the original Hebrew this fine psalm of praise is an acrostic. Each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, from Aleph to Tav. It is a fitting response to the reading on the universal scope of the divine love and mercy.

**Reading II: 2 Thessalonians 1:11 to 2:2**

In the latter part of Ordinary Time, the readings from the New Testament become progressively eschatological, thus leading up to the climax in the solemnity of Christ the King and the first Sunday of Advent. Like a musical composer, the Lectionary introduces a theme that it will develop later on.

Paul visited Thessalonica for the first time probably in the autumn of 47 or 48 A.D. or about 15 years after the Crucifixion. His stay was short - a matter of a few months. Later, from Corinth, being assured by his delegate Timothy, that the young community was thriving, he expressed his delight in the letter that we call 1 Thessalonians. He also used the letter to draw attention to certain shortcomings and to issue instructions. This first letter was the earliest of the Pauline letters that have survived and established a tradition for the rest.

A principal reason for the second letter, written only about six months later, was to set right mistaken views on the expected return of Christ. One practical issue was that some Thessalonians, expecting an imminent end, no longer saw any point in working.

In the passage chosen, Paul tells the Thessalonians that the grace of God is necessary at every stage of their lives and not only at the start: the life of faith is a life-long journey. God's 'call,' a word Paul reserves for the saving activity of God, contains within it the power to enable one to respond and to continue responding in faith.

Grace does not eliminate responsibility and co-operation; rather, it makes them possible. In 2:1-2 Paul assures his readers that the Day of the Lord has not happened. Paul's original teaching had led the Thessalonians to look for an imminent return of the Lord.

Then rumours that it had happened purported to come from Paul. Paul puts them right and says that there is a programme of eschatological events that must take place before that day can come.

**Gospel: Luke 19:1-10**

Luke used Mark’s Gospel as a framework and added other stories, such as this one which came from another source. There are several points within it that strongly suggest the memory of an eyewitness. The fact that the principal is named probably means that he would have been known to Luke’s readers.

The story illustrates a theme common to the Synoptics —Jesus' eating with the lowest members of society. This type of behaviour is attested in a remarkable number of different stories and is strong proof of its historical character. Thus, one of the most certain facts we know about Jesus is that he ate with people who were socially ostracised.

One such group were the tax collectors, who were responsible for sending regular payments to Rome. This meant that they were literate and numerate and they included Jesus’ apostle and Gospel author, Matthew. They could impose any rate of taxation as long as they met their obligation and could call on soldiers to enforce their exactions. By his occupation Zacchaeus had excluded himself, in the popular estimation, from his own people. He was a quisling who had thrown in his lot with the hated occupying power for the sake of pecuniary gain.

But for Jesus this does not disqualify the tax collector from salvation; he also is a son of Abraham. For Luke this implies that it is no longer the Law that determines a person's relation to God but a person's attitude toward Jesus and this may include Gentiles, as Paul argued.

Zacchaeus’s unpopularity may well be why he could not gain a vantage point, if the crowd acted in concert. His climbing the tree was thus seen as a sign of genuine faith, which could break through the barriers between God and human beings set up by the Law.

By entering Zacchaeus' house, Jesus dramatizes the coming of divine salvation. Zacchaeus' promise to restore what he had extorted from his fellow Jews is a measure of his repentance. It goes far beyond the legal requirements of restitution (see, for example, Leviticus 6:1-7). Now he hears the word: "Today salvation has come to this house," that is, to him and his whole household or family.

As in the Acts of the Apostles, the conversion of the head of the household carries with it all the other members of the family, including children and slaves. This suggests that the story, even if based on a genuine incident in Jesus' ministry, had been shaped for the Gentile mission. Now comes the climax which concludes the incident, "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."