

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

### **First reading:**

(Wisdom 11.22-12.2)

*God's Love for All*

On the occasion of the conversion of Zacchaeus, read in today's gospel, the Church presents us also with this reading from the Book of Wisdom, which is one of the strongest statements in the Old Testament of God's mercy on all and God's desire that all people should be saved, 'since if you had hated something you would not have made it'.

Again and again, the Book of Wisdom makes much of God's forbearance, that sinners may have every chance to repent. This presents us with the clash: our love for God must be free, so that it is possible not to choose God. If our choice of God must be free, rejection of God must also be a possibility. And yet, would God have created anyone who did not choose him?

We do not know that anyone actually has rejected God. Hell must be a possibility, but is it empty? We have no right to judge the consciences even of the monsters of history, and it is hard to say that anyone has been without some spark of generosity or gentleness or goodness.

### **Question:**

*How is the concept of hell compatible with that of a loving God?*

### **Second reading:**

(2 Thessalonians 1.11-2.2)

*The Final Coming of the Lord*

The earliest Christians were confused about the final coming of the Lord. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingship of God was imminent. Did this mean that the world was coming rapidly to an end? How rapidly? Was the gist of his teaching principally that his death and Resurrection changed everything, even the whole constitution of the world? Then Paul taught that this world was passing away, that Christ would soon come in a great triumphal procession. Some saw the Fall of Jerusalem in 70AD as an urgent sign of the end. The Book of Revelation seems to teach that there will be reign of Christ for 1000 years after the first Resurrection and before the final struggle with Satan and the second Resurrection. Today's reading suggests that some thought the Day of the Lord had already arrived.

Each year, as the cycle of readings draws to an end, the Church reminds us of this final coming of the Lord. When will it be? All we know is that it is imminent, in the sense that we must live in the spirit that God's final reckoning is urgently impending, and 'it is not for you to know the times and dates that the Father has decided' (Acts 1.7).

### **Question:**

*How much do I need to know about the future and the end of all things?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Luke 19.1-10)*

### *Zacchaeus*

The story of the rich little tax collector of Jericho is always a favourite. It was a constant complaint of defenders of the Law and its prescriptions that Jesus kept disreputable company - tax collectors, lepers, Samaritans and prostitutes! He took part in their carousals and seemed to enjoy their company.

Tax collectors are never popular, and everyone thinks they are overtaxed. Under Roman rule the tax farmers were moral outcasts, especially because they worked for the hated foreign dominators, and surely added their own percentage to the tax demanded. Jesus does not even seem aware of their uncleanness. He does not wait for them to repent and approach him, but positively goes out to them and summons them into his company.

Zacchaeus had given no sign of good intentions. This unpopular little man was simply inquisitive, wanting to see what Jesus looked like, not even trying to get near him. One can imagine his open mouthed and delighted amazement, perched in his sycamore tree, as Jesus invited himself to supper over the heads of the intervening crowd. 'Why should Jesus choose me?' No conditions attached, no previous guarantee of good behaviour or repentance! So Jesus draws out our good intentions before we are even really aware of them ourselves.

## **Question:**

*Did Zacchaeus invite any friends to join him and Jesus? Did he have any friends?*

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