31st Sunday in Ordinary Time: 10/30/22—5:00 PM; 7:30 and 11:30 AM

     What an absolutely beautiful convergence of readings we have today in this selection from the Book of Wisdom as it intersects with this Gospel of Zacchaeus! Let’s listen again to these words from Wisdom: ***“You have mercy on all….you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?*** ***But you spare all things, because they are yours, O LORD and lover of souls.”*** What does this mean but that God loves us all, no matter who and no matter what? Even the people we don’t love, God loves. For you who are Republicans, it means that God loves Joe Biden, but for you who are Democrats, it means that God loves Donald Trump. Now this reading continues by stating that ***“you*** (God) ***rebuke offenders little by little, warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing, that they may abandon their wickedness and believe***.” But the question is how does God do that, rebuking, warning, and reminding them of their sins ***“little by little”*** while still loving them?

     That’s where this beautiful convergence comes in between this reading from the Book of Wisdom and this Gospel about Zacchaeus, because that’s where we find the answer to that question of **how does God do that, rebuking, warning, and reminding them of their sins *“little by little”* while still loving them?** We find it in the way that Jesus treats Zacchaeus.

     Who is Zacchaeus? He’s described here as ***“a chief tax collector and a wealthy man.”*** As you might remember, tax collectors were considered as traitors by the Jewish people. They were agents of a foreign power who were cruelly occupying their homeland. They were looked upon by the people as Republicans today look upon Joe Biden or as Democrats today look upon Donald Trump! Plus Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector who had made himself wealthy by that betrayal of their fellow Jews! I am sure that the human side Jesus felt that same way toward Zacchaeus as his Jews did, but look what happens. Jesus is able to let his divine side subordinate his human side and its rage and offers to share Zacchaeus’ table and eat with him, an absolutely unbelievable sign of welcome and friendship! And look what Zacchaeus’ response is to Jesus’ love, welcome, and friendship: Zacchaeus falls all over himself promising to give half of his possessions to the poor and to repaying anyone he has cheated four times over! Wow, what an overwhelming response by Zacchaues to Jesus’ gesture of love, welcome, and friendship!

     Now how does this apply to us? First of all, we need to remember that God loves both the Joe Bidens and the Donald Trumps of this world no matter how much they get under our skin. Then, second, we need to learn to let our divine side subordinate our human side and its rage, just like Jesus did with Zacchaeus.

     I think that St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians gives a good rule of thumb when he encourages the people of Ephesus in 4:15, ***“Living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ.”*** In other words, we too are to live the truth in love, we too are to do the truth in love. We, faithful and practicing Catholics, are very good when it comes to living the truth, to doing the truth, but often times we are abysmal when  it comes to doing that truth, to living that truth, in love, caring for that other person as a person deeply loved by God, as today’s reading from the Book of Wisdom reminds us. I think that St. Francis de Sales puts it in a slightly different way but just as effectively as does St. Paul when he reminds us to ***“Always be as gentle as you can, and remember that more flies are caught with a spoonful*of*honey than with a hundred barrels*of vinegar*."*** How easy it is to let our human side overwhelm our divine side by offering hundreds of barrels of vinegar to those who oppose us rather than doing just the opposite: offering that spiritual spoonful of honey that is living and doing the truth in love.

     But how can we remember to offer that spoonful of honey rather than those hundreds of barrels of vinegar? Well, I think we must always keep in mind the spoonful of honey that the Father has offered to us in his Son, Jesus. Going back to those lines from the Book of Wisdom, ***“You have mercy on all….you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made.”*** When we are tempted to offer vinegar instead of honey, may we take time to remember our very worst sin, our biggest, baddest, and worse sin, to, in a sense, taste that sin, and remember how God offered us that spoonful of honey, his forgiveness in his Son, Jesus, rather than having offered us hundreds of barrels of vinegar.