Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, November 2, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Wisdom of Solomon 11:22-12
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13b-14 | **Response:** Psalm 23:1
Second Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1:11-2
Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 25:34
Gospel Reading: Luke 19:1-10
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

The readings today are about the surprising mercy of God and the dignity of every person—even the one we least expect God to choose.

Dear friends in Christ,

We know what it's like to be seen through a label. In Zimbabwe today, some are dismissed as "vendors," "youths," "corrupt," "poor," "tribal," or "opposition"—as though these were names, not masks laid over real faces. But Scripture reveals a God who sees beyond the labels. Today, we meet Zacchaeus. Not the caricature. Not the stereotype. The man. Small in stature, but vast in desire.

And Jesus, passing through Jericho, stops. Not for the proud, not for the powerful. But for the one climbing a tree to see him. It is always like this with God. He passes through our cities, our crowded hearts, our dry seasons—waiting to be noticed. And when he is, he does not just smile or bless. He says: "Today I *must* stay at your house."

That word—*must*—is heavy with divine urgency. Jesus is not politely asking. He is fulfilling a mission. For "the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." And Zacchaeus, perched in that sycamore tree, is the lost one found.

But before we rush ahead, let us slow down with the Book of Wisdom. It begins not with fear or fire or judgement—but with wonder. "The whole world before you, O Lord, is like a speck that tips the scales." God is not anxious about our sin. He is not nervous about our rebellion. He is not, like us, quick to erase what we do not understand. No, God loves *all* that exists. That means he loves me,

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-02-yc-ot-31/

even when I cannot bear myself. He loves you, even when your dignity has been trampled by poverty, by politics, by powerlessness. He loves them, whoever they are, even when we cannot imagine how.

In Hebrew tradition, to "call to repentance" was not simply to shout or to shame. The word for repentance—*teshuvah*—means "to return." As if every sinner is not a rebel, but a child who has forgotten the way home. Wisdom tells us God corrects us "little by little." Not by force. Not with fear. But with hope.

That hope is picked up in the Second Letter to the Thessalonians, where Paul prays that "our God will make you worthy of his call." It is not that we must prove ourselves worthy before God calls. It is God's call that makes us worthy. This is the order of grace. Not reward for righteousness, but restoration for the weary.

This is why we must resist the temptation to despair when we look around Zimbabwe and see systems so broken that they seem beyond healing. Where the rich dine and the poor queue. Where young graduates wander the streets, degrees in hand, while jobs vanish like morning mist. Where children sleep hungry and the guilty walk free.

And yet—God is still passing through.
And yet—God is still calling us home.
And yet—God is still entering houses, even the ones the crowd would rather he avoid.

When Jesus stops at Zacchaeus's tree he is doing more than offering kindness. He is restoring dignity. In the eyes of the crowd, Zacchaeus was a thief, a traitor, a Roman puppet. His wealth was filthy, his name despised. But Jesus calls him by name. And with one sentence, he rewrites Zacchaeus's identity. Not "corrupt tax collector," but "son of Abraham." A child of promise. A brother. A man who belongs.

This is no small thing. In a world where identity is used to include or exclude, elevate or erase, Jesus restores what society has stripped away. And Zacchaeus responds, not with words, but with works. "Half of my goods I give to the poor." His conversion is not theoretical. It touches his wallet. It reorders his priorities. He gives to the poor and makes restitution to the cheated. He steps out of the tree and into discipleship.

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-02-yc-ot-31/

We might wonder what sort of tree we need to climb this week. What crowd we need to leave behind. What voices we must ignore to see Jesus clearly. It may mean letting go of the fear of being different. Of looking undignified. Of admitting our smallness. Zacchaeus climbs a tree, like a child. And from that childlike place, salvation enters his home.

Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore to see Jesus. In the Spiritual Exercises, we are invited to climb, too—not a tree, but into the field of decision. In the meditation on the Two Standards, Ignatius places us between Christ and the enemy, each beneath a banner, each inviting us to follow. One promises wealth, prestige, and pride. The other offers poverty, humility, and love. For most of his life, Zacchaeus had stood beneath the wrong standard. But that day in Jericho, he chose another way, a better way.

If we were to enter that Gospel scene now, in imaginative prayer, what would we see? The dust of Jericho's road. The crowd murmuring. The laughter as a grown man climbs a tree. The surprise in Jesus' voice: Zacchaeus! And perhaps, if we're honest, we would feel uncomfortable too. Why him? Why not me? Why does God always go to the undeserving?

But the Gospel tells us: we are all undeserving. And all beloved.

This week in Zimbabwe, someone will go hungry while someone else feasts. Someone will be mocked for their poverty. A woman will walk ten kilometres for clean water. A boy will carry the burden of his family's survival on thin shoulders. But the Gospel demands that we see them not as "problems" or "projects," but as persons—sons and daughters of Abraham. Like Zacchaeus, they too must be named, seen, and restored.

And we must ask ourselves: if Jesus came to Harare—if he walked down the potholed roads of Mbare or the leafy avenues of Borrowdale, through the crowded flats of Highfield or the quiet gates of Mount Pleasant—whose house would he enter? Would he stop at the home of the street vendor or the cabinet minister? The single mother in Glen View or the businessman in Borrowdale Brooke? And if he did not come to our door, but passed us by—what would rise in our hearts? Joy? Jealousy? Or the quiet question: why not me?

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-02-yc-ot-31/

Zacchaeus teaches us that no one is too far gone, too small, too corrupt, too compromised to receive Christ's mercy. And Wisdom teaches us that God does not give up on what he has made. That includes the weary widow, the anxious student, the bitter elder, and even the cynical priest. Salvation is not just for later. It comes today, in our homes, in our hearts, in the places where we let God in.

So perhaps today we leave this Mass with a prayer not to be in the crowd, but in the tree. To see clearly. To respond boldly. To give generously. And to trust, as Zacchaeus did, that no one is beyond the reach of grace.

Let us end with three questions for prayer and reflection, drawn from the wisdom of Ignatius:

- Where in my life is Jesus passing by—and how am I being invited to climb higher, to see him more clearly?
- What label or stereotype do I need to let go of, in order to see someone—perhaps even myself—as God sees them?
- What concrete act of justice or generosity am I being called to this week, in response to the mercy I've received?

May we have the courage to climb, the humility to welcome Christ, and the joy to make room for salvation in our homes.

Amen.

Source: https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-11nov-02-yc-ot-31/

This homily is shared for personal and pastoral use. Please attribute the author and do not alter the meaning when quoting. If you wish this homily to be translated - there is an option on the website which will allow you to translate it into the language of your choice.

Licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license.

The author does not speak for the Society of Jesus or for the Catholic Church.

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **WhatsApp**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Telegram**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Signal**

Scan for Website on **Clearnet**

Scan for Onion Mirror **via TOR**

In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.