

PENTECOST 21, C – ALL SAINTS (November 3, 2019)
SCRIPTURES – Is. 1:10-18; Rev. 7:2-17; 2 Thess. 1:1-12; Luke 19:1-10

Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19

Well, our society has just finished its Halloween focus on ghosts and ghouls and zombies and monsters... all in fun, of course. With that behind us our world now rushes headlong into the holiday season. My brother in Cincinnati lamented on Friday that a radio station there is already playing Christmas music.

My holiday rush began by staring death in the face. On Wednesday night I had a wake for a retired Police dispatcher, and then on Halloween morning led his family, friends, and police officers through his burial Service at the cemetery. Being in that cemetery on Halloween was not eerie fun. It was a grim reminder of what awaits us all.

Thank God for the Church's All Saints focus! This morning we see what awaits those who die in Christ: eternal joy and blessedness! Today we pause, before society rushes us into the holiday season, and celebrate: not ghosts and ghouls and zombies, but the life God gives His saints... and *our* saints.

In a few minutes we will be shown God's saints in heaven and hear the question, **"Who are these, clothed in white robes?"** Some are people we knew here and loved. They are with the Lord now, and we will see them again... when we die and join them in heaven. How happy we will all be!... and also surprised. Yes, surprised, because you will see in heaven people you never expected to see. Like Zacchaeus.

Today's Gospel makes him sound like a good man. He wanted to see Jesus. That's good! And, he promised Jesus that he would use much of his wealth, which was surely considerable, to help others. Even better! It's no surprise that Jesus would welcome a good man like him!... unless you knew him. Those who knew Zacchaeus – his neighbors, and those whose taxes he collected – looked upon him as you would look upon a drug dealer from south Norwalk. Tax collectors were known to be cheaters and thieves... a plague upon society... men who cared only for their own well-being. No wonder people grumbled when Jesus honored Zacchaeus by staying at his house. You would have grumbled, also! (As you perhaps do about some who are in our church... and God hears!)

But, Zacchaeus was different! He promised to help the poor! Yes; but only after

rightly given to God. **"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"** cry heaven's inhabitants. God's mercy in Christ is the eternal focus of all praise. The joy and praise of the Lord's redeemed will never be disturbed or ended by troubles or sicknesses or pains, and no one will grumble about anyone else. Zacchaeus' presence, and the presence of every sinner, will be applauded! The Father in heaven will be praised for His mercy in His Son, and for His Holy Spirit's bringing that mercy to us and by it changing our hearts. In heaven God's saints, Christ's redeemed, do not focus upon themselves but only outward: upon Him, and also upon His redeemed.

Bring that focus down from heaven. All Saints Day is looking up into heaven and seeing the joys and life that await us there, joys now shared by those we once knew. This is why we name them. But, All Saints Day is also looking out: upon those still among us, whom Christ has also redeemed. Like Zacchaeus before Jesus met him, not all appear to be very saintly. Boy, there are sinners around!... and they aren't only way out there. They are here.

What should you do? How should you respond? Respond like Jesus! Since All Saints Day focuses on Him – as does every day in the Church! – All Saints Day is about His making of saints: in heaven, yes; but also here.

When you see a sinner in God's house – a Zacchaeus, one whose sin you know, who has *sinned against you* – you have two choices: you can grumble and complain, holding onto your own rightness and the justice of your anger and hurt; or, you can go to that sinner as Jesus went to Zacchaeus. And, why did He go? Was Jesus unaware of Zacchaeus' sins? Of course not. He knew very well that Zacchaeus was a hated and despised tax collector, and also that his reputation would stain him if He stayed at his house. But, **"he also is a son of Abraham,"** Jesus told the people. He, too, was circumcised in infancy, marked with sign of the covenant. He, too, ate of the Passover lamb, the lamb whose blood marked the people of Israel and delivered them from their bondage. God had marked Zacchaeus as His own! Jesus therefore went to him.

You must go to the one whose sins bother you... one who, like you, was baptized into Christ and sealed with the name of the living God; who receives the blood of the Lamb, which washes the robe of his/her life and makes it white, free of every stain of sin. In Christ grumbling ceases and the holiness of mercy, of forgiveness, is shared! This is the focus, the work, of All Saints Day.

It is hard work. It's not a humorous focus upon ghosts and ghouls and zombies and monsters, but dealing with a real sinner; a person whose sin against you has

come to appear before me [in worship], who has required of you this trampling of my courts? New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—my soul hates [them]. What did God want? ***“Cease to do evil, learn to do good; correct oppression; bring justice.”*** ***“For,”*** Jesus says, ***“the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”*** – you, and those who sin against you.

This is heavenly work. It is the work God is doing for you as He every week welcomes you, forgives your sins, and joins you to Jesus. ***“Today salvation has come to this house!”*** He declares. It has come to you; to your neighbor in the pew; and to me. We are blessed to share in it together, and to share it with one another!

All praise and thanks to God, through Jesus Christ, His Son... the true saint, the holy One in whom we are all – His saints in heaven, and His saints on earth – cleansed and made holy, now and forever! Amen.