

Opening the Word: The God who loves all



In a family, children often compete with one another for the affection of their parents. In principle, the children know that they are loved by their parents equally, totally, absolutely. But because of something strangely disordered with the human heart, we can't believe it.

We divvy up love, seeing it as a limited commodity. If mom and dad love this one, this sibling, then what about me? Is their love even special now that it has been given so freely to all?

This dynamic of commodifying love is behind the reaction of the crowd to Jesus dining with Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus is a tax collector. Tax collectors were despised not only because people have always hated taxes! Zacchaeus is despised because he is Rome's tax collector.

[31st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Nov. 3, 2019](#)

Wis 11:22-12:2; Ps 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14; 2 Thes 1:11-2:2; Lk 19:1-10

A native son of Israel, he is contributing to the Roman occupation of Jerusalem. Zacchaeus is functionally part of the occupation, making a significant profit off his malicious work.

So you can understand the grumbling: "You're going to this guy's house?! Sure, he made a fool of himself, climbing that

tree, calling out for you. But now you're going to dine with him? You're going to waste your time preaching to this guy?!"

The answer, of course, is yes. The creator of time likes to waste time on everything. The Book of Wisdom reminds us that God sustains all creation. Every creature in the world exists because of the attention that God bestows to it.

And the sinner, even the sinner exists because of divine love. God does not abandon the sinner to the chaos of noncreation. Instead, God rebukes little by little as the most patient of fathers might.

This tender love is part of divine creation. It is an effective, transformative love.

And it's a love that when turned on Zacchaeus invites his conversion. Jesus goes to the house of Zacchaeus. He dines with him. And Zacchaeus announces that he will give all his money to the poor, all profit to the hungry and thirsty, the widow and the orphan. If he's swindled someone, he will return that amount fourfold.

Jesus doesn't just say to Zacchaeus, "Good job, you've learned a bit about justice." Instead, he announces that salvation has come about through Zacchaeus's conversion. Salvation has been made manifest in this space through one, single sinner returning to the love of God and neighbor.

And Jesus proclaims that this salvation has come because he has arrived not to uphold the righteous, but to seek the lost, the sinner who seems unaware of the power of divine love.

Everything about this account of Zacchaeus should delight us as the Church. God's love is not directed only to those who volunteer at pancake breakfasts on Sunday mornings at the local Church, who belong to the Knights of Columbus or who are catechists in the parish.

Jesus has come to bestow divine love to every creature, even those who are immersed in the darkness of sin and death. Those who struggle with drug addiction, adultery, who are petty thieves, bad fathers and mothers, horrible bosses and friends, miserable husbands and wives – each of these must be invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb.

For God's love is not stingy. There is no economy of scarcity when we're talking about the tenderness of the creator of the earth, of the redeemer of the human family.

This, after all, is the Good News that we celebrate in Christianity. Every nation, every person is called to experience salvation.

If God isn't stingy, we must ask ourselves, why are we?

Timothy P. O'Malley, Ph.D., is the director of education at the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame.