

Homily for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

When you wake up in the morning,
do you love the person whose face you see
when you look in the mirror?

Many of us don't.

Many of us don't love the person God made us to be,
don't love the unique person God loves in each one of us.

And when I don't love the person I see in myself
I will find it difficult to believe that others would love me,
or even that God loves the person I see in my mirror.

But God loves everything he has made
- as we read in Wisdom this morning:
"Oh God, you love all things that are,
you loathe nothing that you have made..."

That's how God sees things.
That's how God sees us: me, you - every one of us.

God loves each of us, made by his hand,
and God loathes none of us whom he has made
for he would not have fashioned what he did not love.

It's interesting to watch what happens to Zacchaeus in the gospel today.
Although St. Luke doesn't tell us how Zacchaeus felt about being short,
this tax collector's height is at the heart of the story.
He wants to get closer, to get a better look at Jesus
but he's too short -- so he climbs the sycamore.

And as soon as Jesus spots him up in the tree he calls out,
"Zacchaeus, come down!"
And not just "Come down" but rather, "Come down quickly."

Jesus wants to meet Zacchaeus right where he is -
at Zacchaeus' own height, in his shortness.
In fact, Jesus not only says, "Come down quickly!" - he says,
"Come down quickly because today I must stay at your house."
Jesus wants to meet Zacchaeus just as he is
and just where he is -- right where he lives!

And Zacchaeus lives in a "house" of extortion and cheating the poor.

Zacchaeus isn't too short for Jesus for Jesus to love,
and neither is he too dishonest, nor too selfish for Jesus to love.

And the people grumble about this
because they all know Zacchaeus is a crook!
But Jesus loves him: not the sinner Zacchaeus may have become,
but the man God fashioned him to be.

There is nothing about my person, nothing about your person,
that keeps the Lord from loving me.
I might believe I'm too short or too tall, too thin or too fat;
I might believe I'm not quick enough, smart enough,
witty, interesting, athletic or strong enough;

I might think I don't pray enough, I'm not good enough, not holy enough;
I might even think I'm a crook --
but none of those things will keep God from loving me.

And when the Lord walks our way, as he does in our prayer this morning,
he's says to each of us:

"Come down! Quickly! I want to come to your house,
I want to visit you right where you live!
And if your house isn't clean and neat as a pin,
if it's not all in order the way you wish it were,
don't let that keep you from welcoming me!
I want to visit the house of your heart.
I want you to know, to believe that I love you.
Yes, maybe you need to make some changes:
so, I'll overlook your sins while you put things in order:
little by little we can make the changes together.
Whatever your weaknesses, whatever your sins,
whatever your shortcomings, I'll help you
because I love you."

The wider I open the door of my heart to the Lord,
the more freely I can let go of whatever keeps me from him.

Zacchaeus thought he was too short to see the Lord.
What shortcomings in our lives, yours and mine,
keep us from seeing the Lord? meeting him?
getting to know him better?

When we look in the mirror in the morning,
do we see only our shortcomings?
do we see only what we don't like about ourselves?

Or do we see a person loved and forgiven by God?

In his Word and in the Sacrament of his presence,
Jesus is passing through here this morning
as surely as he passed through Jericho.

None of us needs to climb a tree to see him
and to each of us, Jesus says, as he meets us,
“Come to me, come quickly.
Today I must stay in the house of your heart.”

Jesus himself once climbed a tree: the tree of the Cross,
precisely to show us how much he loves us, each of us.

If we find it difficult to look in the mirror,
then let us look to the Cross.

And if it's difficult to look to the Cross,
then look to the table where the life of the Cross is ours
in the Bread and Cup of the Lord's Supper.

Come to the table - come quickly!
This very day, the Lord must stay in the house of your heart.

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*