

Year C Oct. 31, 2010 - 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Still somewhat in continuity with the readings of the prior Sundays, the readings today now speak of God's patience and of the always present possibility of even the most surprising changes of heart, "conversions." The Book of Wisdom is probably the latest book to be written in the "Old Testament," close to the time of Jesus. It was written in Greek and is quite influenced by Greek philosophy ("philosophy" means "love of wisdom"). It takes a broad view of things, of the world: it looks at the "big picture." One effect this can have is to take our eyes off ourselves, off our little worlds we create and hold on to and are often imprisoned in. What is translated as "grain from a balance" is that slight drooping of the scale that makes it hard to decide what the exact weight is; in other words, it is an image of nothingness. St. Catherine of Siena knew this well when she repeated that God is the one who is, we are what is not, and that focusing even on our sins detracts from the majesty of God, which is where our attention should be focused.

The Lord is patient. We are allowed many mistakes, we are educated, or disciplined, slowly. But then there can also be that life-changing moment, that last chance missed, when the extra drink or the final gamble at last bring the catastrophe. So the message is never to put urgent things off till the morrow, but to trust in God and work as if we were assured of his victory in the end. The case of Zacchaeus is surprising. Publicans, or tax collectors, were considered great sinners who committed extortion and worked for the occupying power. Zacchaeus is called an "archpublican"! He is at least curious about Jesus, manifestly so, for he climbs atop a tree. No one outdoes the Lord. At this sign of interest, Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' house. There are grumbles from the always conventional crowd. But something great is taking place: the change in the archpublican, who has decided to repair the harm he has done in a generous way. No one is excluded from God's patient love, everyone can be saved. In fact, the Son of man has a special interest in saving those who are considered to be lost. In the end, the difference between those humans who are supposed to count and those who are not is not so great, it is like the morning dew which quickly evaporates.