



out on a limb

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE C

Wisdom 11: 22-12: 2
2 Thessalonians 1:11-2: 2
Luke 19: 1-10

GATHERING

(A globe, a small dish with some grains of sand, a clock set an hour earlier than the correct time and a small plant that has at least a few branches are arranged on a table in the gathering place.)

This week our readings make us aware of God's constant invitation to salvation. God's salvation comes to us each moment of the day, in the strangest places and at the times we least expect. Like Zacchaeus we often find ourselves up a tree or out on a limb. It is at those times that we must remember that our faith in Jesus provides a safety net for us to get down safely and be welcomed by him. Last week we reflected on our attitude and disposition for prayer. How did a change in your attitude or disposition for prayer bear fruit in your life this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(A selection of reflective instrumental music is played. Members contemplate the passage of time in their lives and how they have used their time to further the kingdom of God. When the music has concluded, all pray together.)

All: God of goodness, you created the universe by your mighty power. You have placed us in it to serve you and praise your name. Give us the wisdom to use time wisely, the courage to speak your name without fear and the openness to receive the unloved into our lives as your Son did with Zacchaeus. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

FOCUS QUESTION

When have you gone *out on a limb* for something important?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are read aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then go on to read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

COMMENTARY

This weekend we will turn our clocks back one hour. We will experience darkness coming in the late afternoon, a very visible sign of the passing of autumn. While we will gain one hour, this change of time reminds us once again that time is never redeemable. When it's gone, it's gone. In the midst of the early darkness that will surround our lives for the next few months we know that there is a constant source of light and life for us – Jesus, the one who brings salvation and new life. One person who truly experienced the fullness of that salvation and life is the tax collector, Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus reminds us of God's constant invitation to new life for those who have faith in Jesus. To find this life we must be willing to take some risks, to shed our images and facades, to trust our crazy ideas as Zacchaeus did. Literally, he went out on a limb for Jesus. The end result of his unusual behavior was the invitation by Jesus to come down so that he could visit Zacchaeus' home. If Zacchaeus had not acted out of character he might not have heard those comforting words. "Today salvation has come to this house."

Many times in life we find ourselves *out on a limb* and wonder how we will ever get back to ground. It happens at the time of unexpected illness when we feel a loss of confidence in God's loving embrace. It happens when world and cultural events seem to overwhelm our moral and ethical values. It is in those

moments when we experience so many unresolved issues. When we are out on a limb we cannot forget there is a way to the security of holy ground – the person of Jesus. His invitation is constant: "Come down quickly." We must be willing to take the risk.

This week the scriptures put before us the beautiful image of a God whose love, mercy and care are immeasurable. For the Wisdom writer the universe is a grain of sand compared to the immensity of God's love. Yes, God's care and love for each of us is beyond measure or comparison! Zacchaeus experienced this care and concern and so can we, whether we find ourselves *out on a limb* or in the darkness of frustration. All we have to do is to take the risk of placing our life in his hands.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How does the word, phrase or image that struck you from this week's scriptures speak to your life or the life of the community, your family or your world these days?
- ◆ With the end of daylight savings time approaching, capture in a few words or thoughts how you feel about the passing of time in your life.
- ◆ Describe a moment, in family, work, or parish, when you were *out on a limb*. How did you find a way to come down and feel the embrace of Jesus?
- ◆ When have you ever had the courage to do something unconventional to express your faith in God?
- ◆ Describe how you see your parish as a community that has opened its doors to those who need to know the salvation of Jesus.

RESPONSE IN ACTION

(The leader poses the question, "What does God ask of you/us in light of our sharing of life and faith this week?" After a few minutes of reflection, the leader invites conversation in response to the question.)

- ◆ Most likely in your parish there are some folks who seem to be alone. Introduce yourself after Mass. Perhaps invite the person to join you for breakfast at a local coffee shop.

- ◆ As the darkness of winter comes on, many homeless will seek refuge in shelters. Collect clothing from your wardrobe that has gone unused this past year and share it with those who need human warmth and the warmth of God's love.
- ◆ Resolve that the next time your parish celebrates the Rite of Acceptance for people seeking membership in the church you will attend the mass at which that rite will be celebrated. Offer the person(s) your welcome and promise of prayerful support.
- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes for reflection some day this week. Spend some time in front of a large tree. Imagine yourself caught on one of its limbs. What risk do you need to take to reach safety? Ponder the risks God is calling you to undertake at this point in your life.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Let us reflect in silence on the risks we have taken, or need to take, for Jesus, particularly in the light of our national election. (*Extended pause.*)

Gracious and loving God, let your Spirit be with us today. Hear our prayers, and increase in us the will to be followers of your Son, Jesus. Help us to draw on the resources of our faith as we use the opportunities of our democracy to shape a society more respectful of the life, dignity, and rights of the human person, especially the unborn, the poor and vulnerable. We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

All: Amen.

(Members stand, join hands and pray the Lord's Prayer. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)