

31st Sunday.07

1. If you take a walk downtown in Woonsocket, you will see that some of the buildings there were built about the same time as our church, and they are very good looking buildings. Care has been taken in their details, those little extras which can make such a difference, the difference between a rush job and a carefully planned and executed piece of work. And all of us, even those of us not skilled in a particular field, whether the field of architecture or that of cooking, can appreciate these details.

2. It is the same with God. He has given attention to the details of his work, his creation. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that he is attentive to us too, even though in one sense we are simply a small detail of his work. Very often in Asian paintings the human being is simply one little object in a landscape. That is very different from the paintings and sculpture of the world of 15th century Western renaissance when artists became fascinated with the human person. Think of Michaelangelo's David or his paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The human being is front and center. Nature is simply backdrop to the human person and human drama.

3., According to Christian faith this emphasis is justifiable because the human person is God's masterpiece. However, this emphasis has sometimes led to misinterpretations. God's command given to man to dominate the world has been misinterpreted. It has not been interpreted correctly as stewardship, as the role of the gardener in the garden, but incorrectly giving human beings the right to do whatever they want with the rest of God's creation. This misinterpretation is now under attack by environmentalists and ecologists who want to make us aware of our place in nature. But in correcting this misinterpretation they are in fact calling us back to a more authentically Christian understanding of our place in God's creation.

4. Today's first reading from the Book of Wisdom wants to teach us a similar but larger truth. It is not talking about the place of humans in God's creation. No, it is talking about God's entire creation, the universe, and it tells us that compared to God this whole universe is like one grain in a scale. Can you visualize that image? You have an ancient scale with its two dishes or bowls suspended from a crossbar. Can one grain make a difference? Can it tip the scale so that one dish or bowl weighs more than the other? No, it cannot. So is the universe with respect to God. The second image is of a drop of morning dew falling on the earth. Can it be

detected? Not by human eyes. Such is the universe compared to God, the author tells us. God is that big and the world is that small compared to Him.

5. That could frighten us. If the universe is that insignificant compared to God, what hope can we have of even being noticed by God, we who are such a small part of this universe? But the author's answer to this question is one we can treasure.

Addressing God, he says: "...You love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made.... You spare all things because they are yours." And he gives this name to God: Lover of souls.

6. Lover of souls. We think immediately of psalm 8: "When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place—what is man that you are mindful of him, mortal man that you care for him?" Then, answering his own question, the psalmist says: You have made him little than a god, crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, put all thing under his feet." Yes, we Christians can never become so green that we deny the centrality of human beings in God's creation, a centrality which is crowned by our belief that in Jesus God has become one of us, a human being. And when God in the flesh walked among us, he paid attention to the least detail of

his creation and to the least among humans. It is the little Zacheus, the hated, sinful tax collector who catches Jesus' eyes. It is to his house that Jesus invites himself.

7. On those cold days when we are feeling very small and unimportant, we should recall this central belief of our faith. It is the human being who in Jesus has become united with God, and it is the poorest and smallest and most despised of human beings who are the objects of God's special favor and love, the objects of Jesus' affection as we see in the tax collector Zacchaeus.