

## **November 3, 2019**

### **Thirty-First Sunday of Ordinary Time**

My annual physical exam is a humbling experience for me because I am slowly shrinking. I was once 5'6 ½" then 5'6" and now I am 5'5". Not a surprise then that my favorite person in the Bible is Zacchaeus. He is the short person who makes it big with Jesus. This short story about Zacchaeus has a big message for us.

What makes the story about a man, short in stature, so big for us? Like with many things in the Bible, Zacchaeus's stature has more meaning than his lack of height. Zacchaeus's climbing the tree means more than a fully-grown man doing something ridiculous in front of everyone that only a young boy would normally do.

What is the Gospel of Luke telling us by letting us know that Zacchaeus was a short man? The scripture is letting us know that people saw Zacchaeus as a little man in every way. The people had little respect for him. They saw him as a tax collector who operated like a dishonest thief. He took more than his fair share, otherwise how would he have become so wealthy? Jericho was a cross roads for numerous places, including Rome, which was the occupying power of the time and the people hated the Roman authorities because they taxed the people heavily with little to show for it. Zacchaeus worked for the Roman authorities so the people considered him an outsider in every way. They had plenty of evidence to judge Zacchaeus's character and even his heart. You might say that the respect for Zacchaeus over the years kept shrinking in the eyes of the people. The more they looked at him, the less respect they had for him. They saw him as a very little man, indeed.

We know from the scriptures that God alone knows the heart of a person. Jesus, as God, saw something very telling when Zacchaeus climbed the tree. He saw in this short man, a suffering man whom people resented who was willing to humble himself in order to see Jesus. When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, he looked into his heart. Jesus saw the full height of Zacchaeus's human dignity as he climbed the sycamore tree. Jesus saw that Zacchaeus was willing to take up the cross of humility to follow Jesus. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem where he would soon climb up the tree of our salvation.

Jesus says to Zacchaeus that he must eat at his house that day. Jesus had to go to the home of Zacchaeus's heart because he had truly opened his heart to Jesus and showed him his littleness and vulnerability. Zacchaeus demonstrated his sincerity when he publically promised to change his life, to give to the poor and to pay back four times over all those that he had wronged.

So what do you do when you are up a tree? When others might not think too highly of you for your actions or when you have gotten you into a tight spot? When maybe your influence seems to be shrinking? That can happen with a move, a job change, moving from middle school to high school. It sometimes happens when your kids are become teens or when they move out of the house. It can happen at retirement or when we can no longer drive a car. Many things in life can make us feel little. What can we do? If we can take Zacchaeus as an example, we can do whatever it takes get ourselves in a position where we can see Jesus. We try to see him with true humility and let him see us as we truly are. That might be by coming to this church to pray in silence before the Blessed Sacrament, it might be in your room by yourself, it might be in your car, or in the woods on a hike, wherever it is, it is looking to see Jesus and to allow him to see you. It might mean to come to the Lord in in the sacrament of reconciliation to make a real change in your life. Whenever we show ourselves to Jesus as we truly are, he will come to us and he will say "I must stay at your house today" meaning, I must come to your heart today. His presence will change everything.

Each time we come to receive the Eucharist we climb the tree of everlasting life and we unite ourselves to the death of the Lord so that we may rise with him. We sing the mystery of our faith, "We proclaim your death O Lord, and profess your resurrection, until you come again." He will come again at the end of time. He also comes again right now to stay in in the house of our heart when we humble ourselves in his sight, as did Zacchaeus.

