

By a show of hands, how many people here today are without sin? Uh oh, okay, how many people here today are sinners?

I am a sinner who loves Jesus; a sinner who wants to do the right thing but sometimes, or maybe often, falls short of the mark.

Isn't that what brought us to church today? We, like Zacchaeus in today's gospel, are searching for a relationship with Jesus. Pope Francis recently said something profound, and in some ways contradicts the practices of his church. He said: **"The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."** Amen! "The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."

In the Jewish tradition of the time, people would never break bread or share a meal with someone who had wronged them. To share a meal, to invite someone into the home, was sacred, a sign of unity. When two people who disagreed or had a strained relationship shared a meal, it meant that all had been forgiven, that the relationship had been healed. So, when Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house, he was telling Zacchaeus that all was forgiven, his relationship with God was mended. What a beautiful gift Jesus gave to Zacchaeus and to all who had observed their interaction.

Like Zacchaeus, Jesus invites us into relationship. Jesus gives the gift of himself to us – his healing presence, his abiding friendship, and his unconditional love. Are we worthy of such a gift? Yes, because God loves us, God forgives our failings, and God wants to be in relationship with us. We may not be sitting in a tree like Zacchaeus, but Jesus recognizes us in the crowd, even when we try to hide. Jesus singles us out, and invites us to dine with him, to enter into relationship. The invitation is there, but the question becomes, how will we respond?

When we look around the church today, we are a collection of interesting people from a variety of walks of life. Each one of us here has our own story, our own struggles, and our own reason for being here, and we do our best to feel at ease with everyone else, putting our judgments on hold,

welcoming each other. Indeed, in Christ Jesus, we are drawn together into the mystery of the Eucharist, to be fed, to be strengthened, and to be healed.

As we approach this table today, we are not only entering into relationship with Jesus, we are also entering into relationship with one another, in fact with people from all around the world. As we feast together on the Body and Blood of Christ, we are affirming our relationship with people from all around the world. We are forgiving those who have wronged us and accepting the forgiveness of those we've wronged. In the Body of Christ, we are standing in solidarity with people from every walk of life, saints and sinners, who dine at the Table of the Lord.

Jesus didn't condemn Zacchaeus or point out his faults. Jesus didn't even rebuke him at all. In the spirit of our first reading from the book of Wisdom, we can say that Jesus offered healing to Zacchaeus by overlooking his sins. And how did Zacchaeus respond? He repented. Experiencing the love of Jesus, turned his heart around, broke through its hardness and freed him.

The loving gaze of Jesus that told Zacchaeus that he was important, that he was loved, broke through all the layers of defensiveness, fear, anxiety, greed – whatever Zacchaeus was carrying – Jesus broke through it all; and reminded him of who he was – a beloved child of God. This is what Jesus is offering to each one of us.

My friends, God is ever faithful. God is always inviting us to get up and to try one more time, to never stop seeking God's presence in our lives. Like Zacchaeus, we can come down from our hiding spot and walk with Christ, trusting in the vision God has for us and for the world, trusting in what God has in store for us.

In a short while we will pray the words: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed." Believe it! "Today, salvation has come to this house." Let us keep going and allow ourselves to get drawn more deeply into the mystery that is Eucharist.