

Let Nothing Hold You Back

My sisters and brothers in Christ,

In today's gospel we heard about Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus, who was described as a chief tax collector. Ordinarily, tax collectors in the time of Jesus were particularly unpopular. They collected taxes from their fellow Jews for the Romans who at the time exercised oppressive rule over the people. When collecting taxes, the tax collectors would always include something for themselves, determined at their discretion. Some were very generous to themselves when they added additional tax. Leaders in Rome cared little about the additional taxes gained by tax collectors as long as they received the amount they thought should come to them. And so, tax collectors made their wealth by means of excessive taxation - by exploitation and greed.

To be a chief tax collector is to be the manager or CEO of others. All the other tax collectors reported to the chief. You can imagine how much wealth a chief tax collector could amass for himself by being in that position. More so, people were afraid of them because to threaten or resist compliance to them was to challenge Rome.

For Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, to subject himself to the lowly act of climbing a sycamore tree was unthinkable. Something pretty serious must have been going on. And indeed, something very serious went down. **It was an encounter with Jesus.** An encounter that changed the life of Zacchaeus forever.

Zacchaeus heard about Jesus. He knew that a touch from Jesus would transform his life. He never let anything hold him back from seeking just a glimpse of our Savior, Jesus Christ. His status in the society, his height, his wealth, his connections never stood in the way of this life-changing encounter with Jesus.

With Jesus, Zacchaeus' life was never the same again. Honesty and concern for the poor and needy replaced cheating and greed as the dominant navigators of his life.

Is anything holding us back from a transforming encounter with Jesus? We have excuses for not praying, for not attending Mass, and for not following the Church's teachings. We have excuses for not giving something up for Lent, for not going to confession, for not reading the Bible, and for not spending time with our families. All the while, we miss out on what God has to offer us. So many gifts of peace and joy are lost because we are too busy making excuses, rather than taking the risk of following the path Jesus calls us to.

This week make no excuses, but take one step, just one more step, in following Christ.

May the grace from of the Holy Spirit guide us always.

God bless you this week.

*--Fr. Anthony Ahamefula
Parish Priest*