

## **31st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE C**

*Wisdom 11:22 – 12: 2 + Psalm 145 + 2 Thess. 1: 11 – 2:2 + Luke 19: 1-10*  
10:30 a.m. Mass, Holy Spirit Catholic Church: November 3, 2019

Last week a tax collector in one of Jesus' parables taught us that humbly trusting in God's mercy is the proper way to approach God in prayer. This week another tax collector in real life humbly seeks out and receives the Son of God into his home, confirming the good news of last week's parable.

Jesus has every intention of quickly passing through Jericho on his way up to Jerusalem, where his rescue mission will be accomplished.

However, in his encounter with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, Jesus' plans are changed and Zacchaeus is forever changed.

Jesus smiles as he sees what lengths this wealthy sinner will go to in order to see him, as Zacchaeus humbles himself to do so.

Imagine the sight of this well-dressed adult man perched in a tree and hear the laughs from the crowd when they see him there, legs dangling from a branch.

Zachhaeus is willing to humble himself, to not even care what others think, in order to grab a glimpse of Jesus.

The crowd plays the role of last week's Pharisee,

judging this tax collector as unworthy, especially unworthy of a visit by Jesus.

Comparing and judging, they only see the surface, and what they see is a great sinner, a hated man who has become wealthy by cheating them and abusing his power.

But Jesus sees deeper, he sees into the heart, and what Jesus sees in Zacchaeus' heart causes him to alter his plans that day and stay in Jericho.

Usually Jesus goes to people's homes at their invitation,

but he steps out on a limb and invites himself into Zacchaeus' home.

In this life-changing encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus' life is transformed.

A little sign of God's love from Jesus changes Zacchaeus.

His encounter with Jesus impacts the lives of others---

Zacchaeus' family who will feast with Jesus that night,

those he has cheated, whom he will repay abundantly,

and the poor, who will be blessed by his generosity.

This wonderful story in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke's Gospel is a perfect example of how the Lord Jesus draws us to himself, that we might be "found" by Him. This encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus also reveals how "being seen" by Jesus and held in his loving gaze changes us.

Feasting on Jesus' merciful love as he invites himself into our lives not only changes our life forever, but also impacts and changes the lives of others as well.

God always acts first in these encounters, seeking us out, desiring us, wanting to share divine life with us.

In Zacchaeus' desire to see Jesus, the power of God's grace is already at work. His curiosity arises from what he has heard about Jesus and how Jesus has transformed the lives of others.

His curiosity produces a desire which impels him to do something laughable—climb a tree—just to see Jesus.

In his desire for something more, in his hunger to fill the emptiness in his life, the grace of God is already at work in Zacchaeus, drawing him to the Son of God.

Jesus desires to invite himself into our lives, into our homes, into the "house of our heart."

Whenever he finds the slightest opening, he invites himself in.

No matter our past life, he says, "*I must stay at your house today.*"

No matter how great a sinner we've been, no matter how long we've been away from him, the Lord Jesus says to us here and now: "*I must stay at your house today.*"

When we encounter this life-changing love of the Lord Jesus, when we open the door to our lives and to our hearts and let him in, we are transformed. But not only are we changed, but everyone whose lives intersect with ours is changed by our encounter with the Lord.

For our relationship with Jesus is never private, it is never meant to be just between "Him and me". This relationship impacts every relationship in our life.

The members of our families come to know Jesus' saving love and mercy flowing through us.

When we make amends with anyone we have wronged, then they want to do the same. Sharing our possessions with the poor, we restore their hope and bring them new life, so that they want to share what they have, too.

Those who today are taking their first public step to become Catholic have experienced a life-changing encounter with the Lord Jesus. He has sought out and found them, inviting himself into their lives.

These adults and young people come before our community of faith today, humbling themselves like Zacchaeus, in order to more clearly see Jesus as he comes to them. Like Zacchaeus, they may feel like they are perched in a tree for all to see, as they come before us express their desire for the Sacraments of the Church, to be one with us in our Faith.

The Spirit of the Lord Jesus has been at work in their lives, prompting a curiosity to see and know Jesus. For catechumens, this curiosity has deepened into a strong desire to come to know Jesus in and through this Community of Faith. For baptized candidates, their curiosity has increased their desire to know Jesus more fully. In many different ways, they have “seen” Jesus in the lives of people of faith. Through the Rite of Acceptance and Welcome, the Lord Jesus invites himself into their “house.”

In this ongoing encounter with the Lord who has sought out and found them in the embrace of his life-giving love, our catechumens and candidates have been changed. Their lives are different. Jesus has knocked at the door of their heart, and they have opened it and invited Him in, and that has made all the difference!

This encounter with Jesus, who loves them as they are, impacts the lives of others. Some of their family members are also being drawn into the Church by their example. Other family members and friends and co-workers will become curious about the change in them, curious about what has happened to make them more joyful and more generous.

Their joy and generosity, both fruits of the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, will bless the lives of others, who in turn will be more apt to be generous and joyful toward others. These catechumens and candidates also impact the lives of all of us gathered here to worship, as we see them publicly declare their desire to deepen their relationship with Jesus living in the Church. Our faith is strengthened, our eyes are opened to see how the Lord seeks out and saves others, and how He is doing the same for all of us at this very moment.

C.S. Lewis once observed that the greatest sinners and the greatest saints are made of the same stuff.

We need look no further than the the lives of the two pillars of Christianity, St. Peter and St. Paul.

Luke the evangelist shows us something similar in the story of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus had accumulated wealth with great zeal, and now, in his encounter with Jesus, he turns that same zeal to the service of the Gospel, as he shares with incredibly generosity his material goods and his life with others.

As Christ's disciples, we are called to seek out the companionship of sinners, even great sinners, for many of these are on the threshold of conversion. All they await is a sign of God's love—perhaps from us—to become great saints.

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*