

Homily 31st Sunday Year C 2022

The name Zacchaeus comes from the Hebrew meaning “*clean, pure, innocent*” and it is possible that he has been misunderstood. He had to pay Rome all the taxes before becoming a chief Tax collector. He would then attempt to recoup the money through collecting the taxes. Many did not succeed to do this. Jesus allows Zacchaeus to answer his critics> He makes it clear that he has always given half his income to the poor, that he never knowingly cheated anyone and is ready to make restitution if he had. Zacchaeus was true to his name

Being fascinated by certain people, the Pope, the king, members of the Royal Family, heroes, we often harbour a desire to meet them in the flesh and gain a first-hand impression of them. In the 80’s, I cycled to Rome from London with three others to raise money for cystic fibrosis. Fortune allowed us to go to Castel Gandolfo for mass with the Pope at which I was a privileged concelebrant. Afterwards, we were able to speak to Pope John Paul II and also talk with Mother Teresa who was present at mass. What struck me the most was that neither was very tall and that they were real people like you and me. Could it be that Zacchaeus was the first in a very long line of small people who became great because of a special encounter with Jesus Christ?

Ever since that encounter, whenever I meet anyone, I ask myself what hidden greatness are you hiding from me?

The Zacchaeus encounter with Jesus can help us understand why we are drawn back to receiving Jesus Christ in the eucharist time and again. This is our special encounter with Christ who opens us to our inner greatness. Jesus comes to us in the eucharist as he came to dine with Zacchaeus.

Macrina Wiederkehr osb puts into words what Zacchaeus must have discovered in his encounter with Christ and what is offered to us in the eucharist.

“All too often we bemoan our imperfections rather than embrace them as part of the process in which we are brought to God. Cherished emptiness gives God space in which to work. We are pure capacity for God. Let us not, then, take our littleness lightly. It is a wonderful grace. It is a gift to receive. At the same time, let us not get trapped in the confines of our littleness, but keep pushing on to claim our greatness. Remind yourself often, “I am pure capacity for God; I can be more.”

Macrina also recognised how our encounters with Jesus and with each other are mutually nourishing. The following words could easily have been spoken by the human Jesus:

“I wind in and out of people’s lives. Having touched them, I am blessed. Having touched me, they are blessed. Our roots are deepened. Our wings are strengthened. We have given each other grace to live more deeply.”

A politician was walking down the street when he encountered an armed robber...

Robber: (points gun) Gimme all your money!

Politician: You better be careful young fellow; I am one of the most powerful politicians in this country.

Robber: *thinks* then says: Alright, give back all **MY** money!