

31st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle C

October 31, 2010

St. Margaret Parish, Bel Air

The Lesson of Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus is judged as a bad person. This is the opinion that is held and circulated by those around Zacchaeus. He is even convinced of that himself. After all, he is a tax collector, in effect, a traitor to his own people because he works for the occupying Romans. He is probably corrupt and unethical. All tax collectors of that day are. On top of that, physically he is a small man, short in height. No wonder he cannot get through the crowd to see Jesus. When he tries, the others just look down at him and say, *“What are you doing here? This is no place for you.”* They push him to the outside of the circle they are forming around Jesus. Zacchaeus cannot get in.

But Zacchaeus really wants to see Jesus. He has heard about him and is at least curious. Maybe it is a feeling that even though he has so much, something is missing. Something is incomplete in him, in his life. There is just something about Jesus that attracts him and he wants to at least see him. So amazingly, Zacchaeus, a rich man, sees some poor boys up in a tree and that gives him the idea. He runs down the road a bit and climbs the tree. Jesus and the crowd milling around him finally get to the point where the tree is. And Jesus stops and looks up at Zacchaeus. He calls out, *“Zacchaeus, come down from there, because I want to be a guest in your house today.”* Zacchaeus climbs down and happily leads Jesus to his home and welcomes him.

Some of the people begin to grumble. *“How can Jesus, who is supposed to be such a holy person, do this? Doesn’t he know that this man is no good?”* They all say that Zacchaeus is a sinner and on this Jesus agrees. They all say that Zacchaeus is no good but on this Jesus disagrees. Zacchaeus is a sinner. His ethical life is bad and his decisions are wrong. But, to say that he is no good is impossible for Jesus because he knows that Zacchaeus has been created by the Father. There is a goodness in him that no one can take away and that is placed there by God. Isn’t that what our first reading from the Book of Wisdom says today? *“You, God, love all that exists and you hate nothing that you created, because if you had hated it, you would not have created it.”*

Jesus comes to reveal this goodness in Zacchaeus and in us. It is this positive good in Zacchaeus that Jesus awakens and calls forth. It is this same positive good that we are to allow Jesus to awaken and call forth in us and others. If we only stress the negative, this goodness might get lost, but not in the sense that it is no longer there. A lost key or a lost credit card or a lost pen is still there, but we just don’t know where and the task is to find it. Jesus comes to find this goodness and once found, it blossoms immediately in Zacchaeus. The same thing can happen for us and for others.

So, just think what the results of this approach can be. If we adopt this approach of Jesus, how much more positively will we view ourselves as persons? If we adopt this approach, how much

more positively will we engage in the Penitential Rite here at Mass or in our Sacrament of Reconciliation? If we adopt this approach of Jesus, how much more hopeful will we be when we have to confront a son or daughter who is going down a harmful road or when we have to deal with stresses and upsets in our marriage? And finally, if we adopt this approach, what an uplift will we give to the toxic tone of public conversation in our society today?