

31<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (October 30, 2022)

Imagine you are at home some night, relaxing after a busy day in the field or at the office or taking care of your family. The doorbell rings and it's a public figure you deeply admire (maybe Pope Francis or some other public leader or celebrity) or a close relative or dear friend you haven't seen for a long time. After the surprise at seeing this unexpected guest has worn off a bit, imagine that person says to you "I want to stay at your home tonight." Maybe you go into panic mode, or maybe you are so honored by that request that you scurry around the house to get things ready for your guest.

Welcome to the world of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector—a most unpopular person then as the IRS is now. Tax collectors were hired by the Roman empire to get all they could by whatever means possible, honest or dishonest; any amount they collected over their quota they could keep. It was a system guaranteed to lead to corruption, and it did so over and over again. And we have no reason to think that Zacchaeus was any less conniving or dishonest than anyone else.

And yet Jesus called out to this despised tax collector who was literally up a tree: "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." Zacchaeus had been curious about this Jesus figure and wanted to see him—that's why he climbed that sycamore tree. He was overjoyed with Jesus' 'self-invitation' to his home, and it changed him completely and immediately. "I'll give half my wealth to the poor; if I cheated anyone [which he probably had], I'll reimburse him four times over." Talk about an instant conversion!

Now imagine again you are at home at night after a long day; the doorbell rings, and there is Jesus in the flesh just as he appeared to Zacchaeus. And imagine saying to you "May I stay with you and your family tonight?" How would you react? I'd like to think I'd be so grateful and say "Jesus, my Lord, please stay with us!" and show him great hospitality. More likely, however, I'd stand there speechless, maybe a bit afraid (or a lot afraid) and wonder "what in the world is going on here??"

You know what? This isn't simply a game of 'let's imagine' ...because Jesus does in fact invite himself into our lives and our very selves. Not in the sense of speaking to us while we are perched in a tree like Zacchaeus, not in the sense of ringing our doorbell at night and asking to stay in our home, but rather he approaches us in his love and desire for us and his longing to be in a close, personal, and loving relationship with every single one of us.

And if that wasn't enough, Jesus goes ever farther and invites us to receive him into our very selves, our physical bodies through the amazing gift of the Eucharist. It is Jesus himself we receive—his Body, Blood, soul and divinity—when we receive Holy Communion. And Jesus' promise that comes with this gift of himself is eternal life and joy; in his own words from the gospel of John: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day" (John 6:54).

I recently began reading a very good book called “Music and Meaning in the Mass” (I’ll have the details in next week’s bulletin); let me share a few lines that express well this amazing mystery:

*“If a Publishers Clearing House van pulled up to your house with a check for a million dollars, would you open your door? If you won a dinner date with your favorite celebrity, would you go?...If an angel suddenly appeared to you and told you that Jesus, the Lord God Himself...would be visiting your neighborhood Catholic church, and was doing so just so He could personally give you...the gift of His entire Self, would you go down the block to see Him?”*

I can’t promise you a million-dollar check or dinner with your favorite celebrity, but I can promise you something infinitely more precious and valuable: the gift of Jesus Christ himself, especially in the Eucharist. And I can promise that because Jesus himself promised that. You know that; that’s why you are here at Mass today. But how many of our fellow Catholics, perhaps even among our own families or friends, have forgotten or are unmindful of this truth? I encourage you to pray for them and for their return, and maybe even to kindly invite them to join you for Holy Mass.

In the book of Revelation, Jesus says: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). This is such an important truth: it’s not so much that we go searching for Jesus; rather, he comes looking for us. He invites us to welcome him in, but doesn’t force himself on us against our will—Jesus is no gate-crasher. I’m guessing that most of you have seen that traditional image of Jesus knocking at the door. But have you ever noticed that there is no outside doorknob or handle on that door? Jesus knocks, but we who are on the inside need to open the door and allow him to enter. We might say that Jesus knocked on the door of Zacchaeus’ heart and mind. Zacchaeus opened himself and welcomed Jesus...and it changed his life. Do we have the desire and the courage to do the same?