

The story of Zacchaeus is pretty straight-forward. Zacchaeus is a tax collector; indeed, the chief tax collector. As I've explained before, they made their living by extorting people. They had to give the Romans a certain percentage but whatever they could extort from the people over and above, that was their wage. If anyone wouldn't pay, they could call on the Roman army to back them up. So you can see why they were hated and despised. On top of this, he is Jewish, so he's doubly despised because he's seen as a trader against his own people.

Zacchaeus had done well for himself. He was a rich man and his wealth came from squeezing money out of people. But when he encounters Jesus, he wants to change. Why this sudden desire? Why this sudden change?

First, he allowed himself to "see" Jesus, that is, to see who He was. His climbing of the tree seems to be a symbol of this. He was willing to go to lengths to see Jesus. Contrast this with the Pharisees who, although they see Jesus physically, they do not let themselves "see" Jesus.

But Zacchaeus could see that when he was in the presence of Jesus, he was in the presence of the living God. And beyond that, he was able to see that Jesus loved him. Here he was, despised, hated by his own people, but he hears God call him, "Zacchaeus, come down, I mean to stay at your house today."

Once he understands and feels that he is loved by God, his whole life changes, so much so, that he is instantly willing to give up a huge chunk of his wealth to make restitution for his evil-doing.

When we encounter the living God, when we are able to see and experience how much we are loved by God, our whole life changes. Sometimes, this is in little bits. Sometimes in big moments:

A quiet moment of joy in prayer

A particularly powerful experience of God's mercy in confession

When you experience the birth of your child

But sometimes, we forget how much God loves us. The trials and temptations of life take their toll on us, we stop praying, our hearts grow cold, we begin to think that maybe God doesn't care, we stop "climbing the tree" to look for Jesus, to open ourselves once again to the realization of how much God loves us.

I've invited an internationally known lay evangelist whose name is Jim Murphey to give the Passion Mission. Four nights, November 27-30 in the church at 7pm. There is a flyer in the bulletin and more details are coming soon. The theme: Living a more deeply Spirit-filled life. It's the Holy Spirit who is the love shared between the Father and the Son in the infinite love of the Holy Trinity.

Through this mission, I hope that we will open ourselves to the Holy Spirit anew and come to understand even more deeply how much God loves us. For Zacchaeus, that made all the difference, and once again, it can make all the difference for us.

So clear your calendars, save the dates, and let's seek out the Lord Jesus and come to know again by the power of the Holy Spirit, how much God loves us.

**Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, 2016.**