

I Want to See Jesus!

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time – Wis 11:22-12:2 / Lk 19:1-10
Ave Maria Catholic Church, October 30, 2022 – Fr. David M Vidal

What is Jericho? In biblical history, Jericho is the first town attacked by the Israelites under Joshua after they crossed the Jordan River. Fathers of the Church interpret Jericho as the world. This is a world that was conquered by sin, a world that must be reconquered, and a world that must be transformed and redeemed.

The gospel says that “*Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town.*” These words are so rich in content. They describe the initiative of God. When we were lost in a world of disorder and pride, Jesus came to us and intended to be in our midst. It was not our initiative; it was God’s initiative. He came to meet us. He came to redeem us. He came to save us. He did so out of love and out of compassion.

After introducing the love of Jesus, the gospel directs our attention to Zacchaeus. **Who is Zacchaeus?** Zacchaeus is not only a tax collector (as the Apostle Matthew was) but a “chief tax collector.” Zacchaeus is very rich. Zacchaeus is a man of Jericho or a man of this world. He had everything that the world could offer him. The gospel also provides a surprising detail: Zacchaeus was short in stature. That is the paradox of Zacchaeus: in some ways, there is greatness in him, but in many other ways, Zacchaeus is small.

Who is Zacchaeus? He is a historical figure, but in a spiritual sense, we are Zacchaeus. We have talents and gifts. In one way or another, there is greatness in each one of us. But at the same time, we experience “littleness.”

How do we experience littleness?

At the beginning of Lent, on Ash Wednesday, Catholics and Christians have a desire to receive the sign of the cross on their foreheads. That is an impressive sign. With the imposition of ashes, we hear these words: “*Remember that you are dust, and unto dust, you shall return*” (Gen 3:19). That is the first book of the Bible.

We remember that we did not always exist. We remember that we were not, and the world was spinning without us. That is humbling. We remember that we were created. It means that *we were not, and we came to be.*

We also remember that our life on earth is limited. Let us try to push our imagination to the limits. Could we live on earth for more than one hundred and ten years? We came from God, and we return to God.

We also remember that we fail. We remember that we fall short of the mark and that we also need to say: *"I am sorry."*

Unfortunately, sometimes we have a very short memory. Or, what is worse, we have no memory at all! However, it is good to remember! Why? Because by remembering our littleness, we recognize our need for goodness and search for it.

That is the experience of Zacchaeus. Even though he has everything the world can offer him, he is not satisfied, and he *is seeking to see Jesus*.

Now, let us focus our attention on Christ. **Who is Jesus?** Jesus is God with us, the Emmanuel, the Word of God who took flesh and dwelt among us. It is no wonder that Zacchaeus was seeking to see Jesus. In Zacchaeus, we also discover our own hearts.

Saint Augustine describes our search with these words: *"O Lord, You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You,"* (*Confessions*, 1). Like Zacchaeus, we are also restless. Our hearts look for greatness, and nothing will satisfy our hearts except God himself.

Our first reading today, taken from the book of Wisdom, describes God's greatness: *"Before You, the whole universe is as a grain from a balance, or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth,"* (Wis 11:22). Is the universe just a little grain or a little drop? Yes, and even that comparison falls short in its analogy of the greatness of God! Let us put the things of this world in perspective. Let us lift ourselves higher. Let us try to see the things of this little world as if we were on a plane. The higher we go, the smaller things will appear until we realize that the whole universe is like a grain of a balance and a drop of morning dew.

Zacchaeus was searching for greatness, and he found Jesus. Now, that was not without effort. Zacchaeus' desire was not a simple wish. It wasn't a hesitant "I would like to see Jesus." It was a determined and bold "I want to see Jesus." Then, he climbed the tree.

Let us picture that image: a grown man, a wealthy man, a self-made man climbing a tree as if he were a child. He did not pay attention to whatever people were saying. Perhaps, some people ridiculed him for such a decision and action. Zacchaeus was determined, and his sacrifice was rewarding!

If we are like Zacchaeus in our littleness, we must also be like Zacchaeus in his determination. We must climb that tree too. We must become like children and have the courage to climb all the trees that are needed. The effort is worth it if the result is to see Jesus and hear his words: *"Today I must stay at your house."*

Let us pause for a moment. **Let us contemplate this image: Zacchaeus is next to Jesus.** The little one and the greatest one. And the greatest one says: *“I must stay at your house!”* That is amazing! That is what Jesus does for us. Jesus comes to stay at our house, not just houses of brick and mortar, but the house of our hearts and souls.

And we may ask: Why does Jesus do this for us? The book of Wisdom provides the answer: because *He is a lover of our souls, He is a lover of life!* (Wis 11:26).

How do we know that Zacchaeus truly welcomed Jesus in his heart? That is not difficult to understand. Zacchaeus learned that love is generous self-giving and that evil-doing is overcome with goodness. He learned to say with joy: *“Half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I shall repay it four times over.”*

In this way, Zacchaeus learned to imitate the generosity of God. The generosity of our good Father in heaven who *“so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life,”* (John 3:16). The generosity of Christ who gives even his life for our eternal salvation.

Jesus entered the heart of Zacchaeus, and for that reason, Jesus said: *“Today salvation has come to this house.”*

Let us never be afraid to climb those trees and face those challenges. If we want to see Him, we must not be afraid of going higher! The effort is worth it. He will not delay in calling us. He will not delay visiting our souls, and we will experience the happiness that Zacchaeus felt. Amen.