

**October 30, 2016 Zacchaeus Homily:** Brothers and sisters, Luke's account of the memorable meeting of Jesus and the tax collector Zacchaeus is one familiar to most of this congregation. One could say that it's "old news" and not necessarily "good news". But that is the problem! So accustomed are we to hearing this gospel reading (Lk. 19:1-10) that we fail to see how shocking the story is for the Evangelist's listeners. Perhaps the most shocking passage of this gospel is the following: "When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said, 'Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.'" (Lk.19:5) Are we surprised that the crowd "began to grumble"? (Lk.19:7) The tax collector was one of the most contemptible men of Jericho. If not protected by the Romans, he's likely to be beaten for his work!

In Jesus' day the city of Jericho was one of the great centers of taxation in Palestine. The tax collector Zacchaeus worked for the Roman authorities. He took advantage of his position to defraud the people. Among religious Jews, he was viewed as a public sinner. In all likelihood he was despised by the Jewish community. Perhaps that may explain why he climbed a tree! Astonishingly, Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name. He does not wait for Zacchaeus to approach him and repent of his many sins. He goes out to meet him and invites him to be his friend. But why, we may ask, did Jesus choose such a scoundrel? The answer is found in today's gospel reading. "The Son of Man has come to seek and save what was lost." (Lk. 19:10)

Jesus converted Zacchaeus. Our Lord's mere presence and goodness were more than sufficient to enlighten the conscience of the corrupt man, immersed in his money, and accustomed to unjust profit. Listen to Zacchaeus: "Behold, 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." (Lk.19:8)

In his little gem of a book, "I walk with Jesus" the French-Canadian writer Jean Vanier, reflects on this gospel reading and issues a challenge to those of us who are complacent and affluent. He writes, "Come down from your tree, from your pedestal! I want to come to your home. Open your heart; welcome Me. You do not have to lock yourself up in your wealth. Do not be afraid. I will teach you the joy of loving."

Recall the Kellogg's commercial for one of its brand of cereals, corn flakes. The unforgettable slogan was "Taste them again for the first time." Perhaps we all need to once again "taste" this gospel for the first time. Perhaps we will be shocked and, what's more, very grateful for our Divine Lord's mercy and kindness!

Amen!