

Homily

31st Sunday in OT

November 3, 2019

Before Jimmy Kimmel and Jimmy Fallon, before Letterman and Leno, before all of the different late night talk shows, there was one talk show. And before YouTube, before DVR's, before VCR's, we only had one chance to watch it. Those of us who remember this also remember making a decision after the nighttime news; do I go to bed now or suffer the consequences and stay up to watch Carson? Anyone remember struggling with that choice?

Johnny Carson was known for his warm, inviting humor, his delightful engagement of his guests, his hilarious, self-deprecating skits and his witty monologues. He also had a funny way of sharing extreme examples, like when he would say, "The town was so small?" And what would the audience say? "How small was it?"

- To put out fires, the firefighters use a portable water pik.
- The "Welcome to" and "You are now leaving" messages are on the same side of the same sign.
- When giving directions, everything in town is "next to that tree."

Stories are made memorable by exaggeration. Exaggerations stick in our minds, allowing us to remember the whole story better.

We have heard Jesus tell us many stories, or parables, over the past several weeks. We remember the prodigal son, the dishonest steward, the rich man and Lazarus, the dishonest judge and the widow and last week, the Pharisee and the tax collector. These parables, as with most of the stories Jesus tells His disciples, include a sinner and a self-righteous person. And they always include some level of exaggeration. This helps us to remember the point Jesus is telling us; always told in love and always meant to instruct us in the way to salvation.

Today, we hear of the events of an actual person and, I would propose, the application of what Jesus is trying to tell us in His parables. And even in this story, we have symbolism and exaggeration.

For example, the name Zacchaeus means clean and pure.

Short in stature indicates what kind of person he was; diminutive in social status, considered a lesser person by his neighbors. Tax collectors were despised because they were dishonest, took advantage of their neighbors and became rich by fraudulent means.

A sycamore tree symbolizes strength, protection, eternity, and divinity.

Zacchaeus, because of his stature, his low standing in his community, wants to see Jesus, wants to, read between the lines, be closer to Jesus, by embracing strength, protection, eternity, and divinity.

We hear that when Jesus reaches the place, He looks up, indicating Zacchaeus has risen in stature by reaching for what the sycamore stands for, and calls him down, indicating Jesus accepts Zacchaeus for who he is, warts and all, and invites himself to the house of Zacchaeus, indicating that Zacchaeus is worthy to have Jesus in his home, under his roof.

Zacchaeus, in his excitement of this marvelous invitation, offers restitution in the form of giving to the poor half of all he has and repaying not just what he extorted, but four times what he stole. That doesn't leave much left over, if anything. But remember, God cannot be out-given. How often do we promise to make things right with God and our neighbor when we know we've done wrong?

The crowd grumbles. How often do we grumble when we see the good fortune of another? Keep in mind that the generosity of Jesus is afforded us all. Even though I know this, I still grumble a little when I experience God's graciousness given to others when I judge it should be my turn.

God cannot be out-given. With every good deed we perform, God graces us with so much more. Zacchaeus only wanted to see Jesus and his effort was rewarded with the Word of God coming into his home.

I recently spoke with an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion who described how much fun he had taking communion to residents at an assisted living community. He shared how he would stay, after giving them communion, and talk with the residents, beaming with joy as he recalled the event. God cannot be out-given.

In the first reading, we hear how big God is. He created the universe and all that is in it. Everything is His. He cares for everything, because He created it. And because God is Good, everything He creates is good. We are good, all of us. And He cares for us, wants only good for us.

That is why we are here today, to participate in God's goodness, be reminded of His love for us, receive Him in His Word proclaimed, and receive Him, physically receive Him, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

We come together, as God wills it, to be one with Him, as a community, the Body of Christ, helping each other, forgiving each other, loving each other, at this Liturgy of the Word and of the Eucharist, and out there, on the street, up in the sycamore tree.

And when we are under the sycamore, judging or complaining, we seek forgiveness, when we are ready, by going to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Father Trinity (Dave) is here; it's in his job description. God only wants what is good for us.

This week, when we are at work, or in our car, or at the store, wherever we may be, let's remember that the stories Jesus tells us are meant to help us to be Good for each other as God intends for us to be. Let's remember when we pray at the elevation in a few moments, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and I shall be healed," let's remember that God is ready. He is always ready; He's only waiting for us to climb the sycamore.