

HOMILY ~ OCTOBER 29/30, 2022

31st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

I had a number of challenges in my childhood growing up, as many of us had. I was born with double vision. In the olden days, they did not have all of the screening that they have now; and it was not discovered right away. I was older when I began to walk. I was really clumsy and falling all of the time. When I started school, I had trouble reading and with everything that required vision. I fell and broke my arm the first day of first grade, so that did not help matters. I went to Catholic School; and at that time, they separated the children by their ability. There were four classrooms per grade. One was the dumb kids, two were for the average kids and one was for the smart kids. That is just what they did at the time. You can probably guess that I was in the dumb class. They did not officially call it that, but the kids knew. When I was in 4th grade, I had eye surgery that corrected the problem; but by that time, I was really behind. I spent all of my grade school years in the dumb class. When I started high school, the counselor told me that I would never be able to make it in college so I should not consider that. That was repeated to me by that counselor every year. As it turns out, I went on to earn five college degrees. I think the way I was able to keep moving forward was because of my parents. I never doubted that my parents loved me unconditionally, and they repeated this to me over and over again. You are not dumb. You can do anything you want to do. You just have to put your mind to it. I believed that they could see something in me when I could not see it myself, and that is what kept me moving forward.

In the Gospel Reading, we hear about Zacchaeus. Now he had some challenges to work through. He was a chief tax collector. Tax collectors were hated by all of the Jewish people. They were Jewish people that were collecting taxes for the Romans. They were excommunicated from the synagogue. Many of them were dishonest and collected more tax than what was due and pocketed the extra money. They were already hated, so they had nothing to lose. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector, so he had many tax collectors working for him; and the reading tells us that he was a wealthy man, so he was probably dishonest and taught others to be dishonest. He wanted to see Jesus. He must have heard a lot about him, so he climbed a sycamore tree so he could catch a glimpse of Jesus. When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, he had a sudden change of plans. The reading says that he intended to just pass through Jericho, but instead he told Zacchaeus to come down quickly

for today I must stay at your house. Jesus called him by name and wanted to stay at his house, to the shock of all of the Jews present. Zacchaeus must have thought: This Jesus that I have heard so much about sees something in me that I do not see in myself. That is true of Jesus. He not only sees who we are, but he also sees what we can become. Notice, Jesus did not criticize or shame Zacchaeus for what he had done. Jesus just loved him, and Zacchaeus reformed his life. The power of the love and affirmation.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Are there people in our lives that we have forgotten that Jesus loves and seeks them? Have we made someone the evil other because we disagree? There has been so much of that in the last few years because we have politicized everything. Have we forgotten that we love some of these people and need them in our lives? The holidays are approaching. It saddens me when I hear family members are not speaking because of disagreement over political issues.

Is it time to open the door? Can you initiate the discussion not to change someone's opinion, but rather to understand them? Sometimes when I hear an individual's reasons for their opinion and their experiences, I understand it even if I do not agree with it. Sometimes we need to just agree to disagree on that one thing and remember that we love each other. Do not underestimate the power of love. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and we need to follow his example. We need to be his hands and feet in the world today. We cannot underestimate the power of Christian friendship.

Parents, I think you have a really hard job. All of your children are different, and they do not come with a set of instructions. You have to figure it out as you go along. Sometimes we need to spend more time trying to catch our children doing something right. I am sure that my parents criticized me, disciplined me, punished me, redirected me; but looking back on my life, I do not remember that. It was the love and the affirmation that I remember. It was the love and the affirmation that changed my life. They saw something in me when I could not see it in myself, and that has made all of the difference.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim