

***Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time***  
***November 3, 2019***

*“All true Christian life, therefore, must begin with a deep yearning to become a new man in Christ, and an inner readiness to ‘put off the old man’ — a readiness to become something fundamentally different.” (Dietrich von Hildebrand, Transformation in Christ, p. 3)*

Have you ever looked at your reflection in a mirror and decided to make a significant change? We can do this with our hair or our weight, even though losing weight may be hard. The degree of difficulty related to these two pales in comparison to the more substantial effort involved in changing our relationship with God. To understand this Transformation, borrowing von Hildebrand’s word, let us look again at the person of Zacchaeus.

Saint Luke describes Zacchaeus as a chief tax collector and a wealthy man. At this time, Jericho was a very important and a very wealthy town. Good traditional practicing Jews would have despised Zacchaeus. He would have associated with and worked for their oppressive rulers, the Romans. Others, unscrupulous men, would have yearned to hold the position of chief tax collector for the wealth they could have stolen. Not holding this position, their hatred of Zacchaeus would have also been great. Sometimes the fervor of religion and the vices of envy and lust are odd bedfellows. They can drive men toward extremes concerning their passions. Oh the irony, he is both surrounded with wealth and false friendships. His house of luxury is a prison of emptiness. Zacchaeus is the man who has both everything and nothing at the same time. He is a walking Greek tragedy. I found myself wondering if the young cultural megastars of our societies have become modern versions of Zacchaeus in this regard. Many have all the money they could ever want, yet they have signed prenuptial agreements. I often wonder how they know if they are loved for who they are or for who they *really* are, minus the celebrity persona. How many have turned to substance abuse to cope with daily life. They too are Greek tragedies.

Zacchaeus intends to change. Yet his change, like ours, is not easy. Turning again to examine human character traits, I imagine Zacchaeus moving slowly through the crowded streets of Jericho in his desire to see Jesus. Unlike today where celebrities are escorted by armed bodyguards, Zacchaeus has no one to shield him from the noses turned, insults hurled, unfriendly shoves, and sucker punches he would have had to endure. I am quite positive there where those who relished the opportunity to give Zacchaeus a not-so-gentle “love tap” with their balled fist as he walked next to them. Therefore, it is no wonder this little, lonely, bruised man would climb a tree to see Jesus and avoid the crowd. In his desperation, little Zacchaeus displayed a giant amount of courage.

Imagining Zacchaeus in this light, forced me to ask myself if I too possessed this same personal courage. Could I even see within myself an inkling of his desire which led him to transform his life? Or, had I ultimately lied to God. Have I only agreed to a “conditional” readiness to change? God, I want to follow you wherever You lead, but only if I can direct where we go and change the route if it becomes too scary or difficult. Let us echo the words of Saint John the Baptist today by asking God to help us allow His will to increase in our lives while ours decreases. If I may add one thing to this beautiful prayer, it would be; God please strengthen us to be men and women of courage, willing to transform the future of our parish church, as we daily strive to transform our lives.