

The 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time — November 3, 2019

Last Sunday's Gospel related the story of the 2 men coming to the temple to pray one a Pharisee, the other a Publican (a tax-collector). Jesus provides us insight into their respective forms of prayer, and directs us toward a 'right disposition' when we come to pray.

This week, we have another very familiar Gospel incident where Jesus encounters Zacchaeus a chief tax-collector. This is very high-drama, a senior member of the tax-collectors, 'a wealthy man' who wants to see Jesus, but he is vertically challenged, and cannot see Jesus because of the crowd. So he runs ahead and climbs a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus clearly 'He goes out on Limb' This generates a great frenzy among the locals "Who does he think he is coming out to look at **Our Jesus** ? We know him and his type, the tax-collectors, they are traitors and thieves. **'WE KNOW JESUS WOULDN'T WANT TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH SUCH PEOPLE.'**"

There is the fundamental struggle once again in the Christian life that 'know it all attitude about Jesus' — "I know exactly what Jesus would do in that situation.' It is such a dangerous attitude, and it constantly gets in the way of progress in the Christian Journey.

Wow ! Jesus disturbed a whole lot of people on this occasion when He stops at the place, He looks up and says :

“ Zacchaeus come down quickly, for today I must
Stay at your house”

Wow it was like 'salt' in the wound of those who were already distressed by his very presence. They began saying : "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner" Can you believe that : Jesus, the Holy One, has gone to the house of a sinner ? The underlying truth was that it unmasked their real faith and their real beliefs. They had a problem that is still rampant in today's society **'He is not like us at all, and we are not like Him.'**

For 2,000 years, that has remained the most critical issue in the Christian Life Not really knowing **Him**, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. We operate out of our own small perspective, and often gather friends of like mind, and decide if we don't like this person or that person, and we build up a case against them then we decide that God must feel the same way. Wow ! Does Jesus turn such logic on its ear in this story.

And true Religion is revealed once again : **God Loves all of His Children and despises none.**

“Now the will of Him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, and that I should raise it up on the last day.” (John 6:39)

It couldn't be more clear than that ! The Goal is Proclaiming the Good News of Salvation to ALL of His People.

Here at St. Paul, I feel we have done a pretty good job of taking on this responsibility. We began ChristLife 5 years ago to really engage our Parish family in understanding the importance of our 'Baptismal Calling.' The teaching of the Pastoral Constitution on 'The Church in the Modern World' from the Second Vatican Council was abundantly clear, that all of the baptized have a mission, not just the ordained, the religious, and professional lay staff. The mission is to proclaim the Good News to all of His people. While we have done a pretty good job of that using ChristLife as a tool, now we are poised to expand that ministry. ChristLife has served us well within our own community of St. Paul, and the resultant Small Groups have provided immense opportunities for growth in our people.

We are now taking the next bold step on this journey. In January, we will be offering Alpha as a way of inviting and encouraging inactive Christians, and non-Christians alike, to come and learn about Christ, and see that He is calling them to a relationship, also. Alpha is the precedent to ChristLife.

Alpha is the core doctrine of the Christian faith what is known as the 'Kerygma' The apostolic proclamation of Salvation through Jesus Christ. We are very excited about this step-forward in our journey. While you may have gone through ChristLife, you are now invited to participate in Alpha which is quite similar. However, there is a little catch this time you are invited to participate if you bring along a friend or a family member, who has left, or fallen away from participation in the Church, or an unchurched individual whom you would like to support and befriend on this journey.

We began a 'Pilot' Alpha program in September to train all who would be leaders, for the upcoming session. They completed their Retreat this week-end, and are fully ready to serve in this capacity. Those who are completing this Pilot process will provide you with any information, any testimony, you wish to hear regarding Alpha. The reason we are presenting Alpha is to step outside of ourselves, and follow Jesus' Great Commission to "Go and make disciples." We are not being faithful to His Commission by just taking care of ourselves, we have got to be focused outside of ourselves that is the Mission we have been speaking of for the past 5 years. Moving from **'Maintenance to Mission.'**

In Alpha, we will provide an opportunity for guests to explore the journey of living a Christian life, allowing the Holy Spirit to be our guide of the process. We are not attempting to make Catholics out of these participants, we are simply inviting them to

explore Jesus' invitation which is extended to all of His people, especially those who are spiritually challenged, very much like our brother, Zacchaeus.

Registration for the January Alpha Experience will open online on Sunday, November 17th. In the meantime, we invite you to enter into prayer to discern whom the Lord may be directing you to invite.

I told you almost a month ago, that I would give you a report on the Building Committee's deliberations this weekend. We have been working very hard on these issues, and we have decided to outline our plan and put the information in the bulletin so that you may have time to pray about the proposals we are offering. There are 2 proposals presented in the bulletin for your consideration and reflection. We ask you to prayerfully consider both proposals during the course of the week.

I appreciate that this is not an easy task given the experience of this long journey Not unlike our fore-bearers' journey in the desert many plagues to deal with. However, I am asking you to consider deeply and conscientiously during the course of this week, **'What is God calling us to do at this time ?**

If it were merely our own personal preferences or opinions, we could vote right now. But, I am asking you a much deeper question. Next weekend, at all of the Masses, we will provide you a card to write down your expressed wishes, and we will follow the direction you provide us. An image of what the card looks like is provided here in the bulletin. And we ask that you come next week prepared to provide us your decision. I thank you sincerely for your patience and your kindness during these very difficult times.

—Fr. Gerry Hurley