

If we ever wanted a sign of the difference that it should make in the life of a human being to encounter Christ, this is it.

Everyone knew what kind of person Zacchaeus was. He was a traitor to his fellow Jews because he collected taxes for the Romans occupiers. He was quite wealthy because he took even more than was required, and lived in luxury from what he stole. And yet, far from God as he was, Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus as He passed by.

Imagine how shocked everyone must have been when Jesus called out to this wicked man: “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” How could any righteous Jew, let alone the Messiah, become a guest in the home of a notorious traitor and criminal?

Meanwhile Zacchaeus quickly went home and joyfully welcomed Jesus into his home. And before Christ said or did anything else, Zacchaeus repented. He accepted the truth about himself, that he was an exploiter of the needy. To make things right, he gave half of what he owned to the poor and restored four-fold what he had stolen from others. In that moment, this despised and miserable man began to turn his life around. And Jesus Christ accepted the sincere repentance of this sinner, proclaiming that salvation had come to this son of Abraham, for He came to seek and to save the lost.

Zacchaeus’ story is the story of us all. Christ wants to commune personally with each one of us created in God’s image, even though we “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23). He comes to bring salvation, healing and fulfilment, becoming fully one of us so that we could participate fully in the life of God.

Notice that Zacchaeus repented by taking some very practical and visible steps that required him to sacrifice what he loved most, his money and comfort. He did what justice required for the victims of his crimes and then some, returning four times as much as he had taken. And he gave half of what he had to the poor, regardless of whether he had stolen from them personally. In response to the Christ’s overwhelming mercy toward him, Zacchaeus showed that same mercy toward others. He not only received the Lord into his house, but into his life – from the depths of his soul to how he made his living and treated other people on a daily basis.

What about us? We commune with Christ in every Eucharist. We dine at His heavenly banquet and receive Him into our bodies and souls. But does our union with him here impact on every dimension of who we are? What change is in order in our lives because of Christ's gracious entrance into our souls?

Is there anyone I need to make things right with according to justice?

Have I taken by selfishness, and need to give back abundantly?

Have I denied anyone my love, and need to make up for it?

Do I look for opportunities to help those who lack money or food or clothing or shelter or friendship?

Zacchaeus is such a wonderful example of a sinner who received the Lord and became a shining beacon of holiness. If we follow his example of deep, genuine, practical repentance, then others - even sceptics - will notice that salvation has come to our house. They may be so intrigued that they even climb a sycamore tree to get a better view!

Father Paul