

31ST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C

In our gospel today we hear the familiar story of the tax collector Zacchaeus who climbed the tree so that he could see Jesus as he passed by. St. Luke tells us that the reason he could not see Jesus was that he was too small. I would suggest however that this was not the only reason why Zacchaeus would have struggled to see Jesus. The other reason was his sin.

Zacchaeus was a senior tax collector for the area. He was responsible for collecting taxes on behalf of the Roman authorities, who occupied the land. Rival tax collectors would bid for the contract to collect these taxes and they would profit by charging more than was due, keeping the extra for themselves.

So, a wealthy tax collector like Zacchaeus was suspect on two counts. First, he was in the service of the Roman occupiers and secondly he was profiting unjustly from the people, by charging significantly more than was due. Zacchaeus therefore was certainly not the type of person that a pious Jew like Jesus would normally have associated with.

More than his lack of height, it was his sinful ways that would have prevented him from seeing Jesus. Jesus however came in search of him. Zacchaeus was drawn to Jesus like a magnet and having encountered him he desired to be a better man. He willingly changed his ways because he could see that the wealth Jesus offered him was so much greater than anything his money could buy.

Notice that it is Jesus who takes the initiative. Jesus calls Zacchaeus down from his tree, by name, insisting that he *'must'* stay at his house. For his part, Zacchaeus willingly cooperates and so the gospel tells us, 'Today salvation has come to this house'.

What we see here is that it is always God who takes the initiative. It was only because Jesus was passing through his town that Zacchaeus came out to see him. The same is true for each of us when we repent of our own sin. We are responding to God's grace acting within us.

The Holy Spirit prompts us to turn away from our sin and recommit our lives to Jesus.