

It may be helpful to have a mental picture in your mind while reading the Scriptures, and today's passage from the Gospel of St. Luke is no exception. Zacchaeus was short of stature, a tax collector, and at least in the eyes of the Jews a very shady character. I cannot help but picture Danny DeVito, whom would fit the bill perfectly.

A tax collector was seen as a collaborator with the government, and yet were Jews. Thus, they were seen as traitors. Too often, they charged much more than they were supposed to charge, and some kept the extra money for themselves. They earned their living by adding an extra surcharge for themselves. These Jews were considered traitors. The Jewish people were not about to lose any sleep over whether or not Zacchaeus was able to see Jesus. The Jews forbade them from holding religious or public offices, nor were they allowed to testify in court. The Jews did not trust the tax collectors.

The Romans wanted to collect as much tax as possible, but did not want to expend the personnel to carry it out; so they made deals with locals. For a price, they could get the locals to carry out their work, saving precious resources and perhaps even demoralizing the locals, who knew that their own people were collaborators with the Romans. Perhaps the Romans thought this would weaken them.

“Zacchaeus, hurry down, for I mean to stay at your house today.” To understand how shocking this was, consider that Jews made themselves ritually impure by entering the house of a public sinner. But this is precisely what Jesus did: “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost, “ and this will not typically happen while waiting patiently for people to come to us. We ought to go out whenever possible to meet them.

There is tremendous power in inviting others to come to Mass with you. It may well be awkward at first- I understand. But if we made a conscious effort to invite others, who knows what new Zacchaeus' we may attract to the Church? It is certainly worth a try.

The little that we get to know Zacchaeus in the Gospel paints a very different picture of this man than the common perception held. His honest response to Jesus at the end of the Gospel is nothing short of amazing. He says, "If I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." He says that he will give half of his possessions to the poor. But before all of that, he did something more fundamental- he positioned himself to see Jesus. He got in the right position, both to see, and I suspect, to be seen. The question for us is, "Do we position ourselves to meet Jesus?"

Perhaps you saw the video or photo of the 6 year-old boy who somehow managed to get to the front of the platform in front of St. Peter's Basilica in the midst of Pope Francis' address to the multitudes gathered for a special Year of Faith event for Families. The boy simply did not give up; he stayed off to the side, and then came forward again during his address to thousands in the Square. He even was seated on the Pope's Chair while the Holy Father stood to address the people. He too was small of stature, but he did not let that stop him; he was positioned correctly for a little one on one time with the successor of Peter! And the Pope never lost his cool.

While the little boy in the yellow shirt may be too young to qualify as being bold, I do think that there are plenty of lessons in the Scriptures that point in the general direction of being persistent. He may or may not have known who the man in white was in reality, but he did know enough that he did not want to leave. He was intrigued and desired to stay near the Holy Father, much like Zacchaeus who desired to see, to listen and to encounter Christ.

What about us? Do we want to encounter the person of Jesus Christ? If the answer is “Yes,” then how do we do it? Do you have a favorite place, a favorite chair, a favorite spot in Church in which you can position yourself in order to meet Jesus? If not, what do you need to do in order to better position yourself to meet Jesus?

We do not need to cross over any barriers designed to protect Jesus, because there are no such barriers. Jesus is accessible to all who seek Him. But part of seeking the Lord entails a willingness to be creative in our search to find Him.

Commit to reading one chapter of a Gospel each and every day per day and see if that makes a difference in one month’s time. Can you spare that much time? Let us learn from the example of Zacchaeus in such a way that we never lose the desire to position ourselves so that that we will encounter Jesus. Let us clear away all that would prevent us from seeing Him, and rejoice in His presence.