

31st Sunday

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10-31-10

When engaged couples come in for marriage preparation, I always ask them how they met. So often, they'll say, "Well, I was supposed to go a party, but that fell through, so at the last minute I ended up over at this other place, and he/she just happened to be there that night. I will never forget that night when I first saw her!"

Friends, I tell you, the grace of God is unpredictable and uncontrollable. Who knows what surprise God has in store for any of us tomorrow?

Jesus had no plans to stay in the town of Jericho; St. Luke says "he intended to pass through." And the reason for that was that Jesus' ministry was to the poor, the marginalized, the sick, the possessed. But Jericho wasn't a poor town; it was a resort for the wealthy, a vacation spot for the well-to-do. Balmy weather year round, palm trees—like Palm Beach, Fla. Jesus planned to pass through on his way up to Jerusalem.

Do you remember a moment when God touched your life? When God spoke to you directly? Jesus glanced up, locked eyes with the little rich guy in the tree and said, "Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today!" "Today, Zacchaeus—now! Tomorrow I will be gone to Jerusalem, and I will not return!"

Zacchaeus practically falls out of the tree. "He knows my name! He knows my name!" The Book of Wisdom says the "whole universe is as a grain" of wheat, and yet God knows us by name. On Wednesday evening, the sky was clear; I was in the country, away

from lights, and could easily our Milky Way Galaxy. Our galaxy is 100,000 light years across, has 100—400 billion stars. And there are billions of galaxies. And the Maker of all of them knew the name of Zacchaeus...and my name too....and yours as well.

The Book of Wisdom says of God, “you loathe nothing that you have made...you overlook people’s sins so that they may repent.” Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. How many people had he defrauded to get there? How many lies? How many broken relationships? Didn’t seem to matter to Jesus: “Zacchaeus, get down! I must stay with you today!” Jesus entered his house...and his life.

During Mass, Jesus comes to this house in the assembly, in the priest, in his Word, and in his Body and Blood. But Jesus doesn’t need spectators here, folks who just watch; he wants people who desire him. Jesus wants lives that long to be transformed. Pope John Paul once wrote, “Allow Jesus to find you!”

Perhaps this Mass, he will speak our name. And we will never be quite the same.

And this being Halloween, let me tell the story of Zacchaeus in a very different way:

Being a Christian is like being a pumpkin. God lifts you up, takes you in, and washes all the dirt off of you. He opens you up, touches you deep inside and scoops out all the yucky stuff—like the seeds of hate, greed, and nastiness. Then he carves you a joyful face and puts his light inside you to shine for all the world to see!

