

Nov. 2 & 3, 2019
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time / Feast of All Saints
Feast of All Souls / 11th Anniversary as a Parish

All Saints Parish, Syracuse
Fr. Fred Daley

No Change – No Growth

As we usually point out while reflecting on the story of the Zacchaeus — tax collectors were not the most popular folks in Jewish society in those days! They were resented, even hated; yet, at the same time, often envied – and for good reason.

Don't forget, Israel was an occupied territory of the Roman Empire. It was the task of the tax collector to gather from the local people, the taxes to be sent to Rome. As long as the tax collectors paid Rome what Rome required, the collector could keep everything else. The ordinary people had no idea how much '*Rome required*' and so... no idea of how much the tax collector pocketed. Business as usual was for folks to be exploited and taken advantage of.

Of all the tax collectors, Zacchaeus could have easily been the richest. His district, in the fertile part of Palestine, was enormously wealthy and he was the "kingpin." As much as people hated him, they also envied him, because he had made it to "the top:" a fat wallet, probably a beautiful, huge home and certainly a lot of power and prestige. There was nothing that Zacchaeus wanted that he couldn't have...

Sisters and brothers, we've heard the Zacchaeus story a hundred times. Did you ever wonder why this wealthy, successful, powerful, secure, prestigious government official would risk the ridicule and scorn of the crowd? Push his way through the dusty, smelly mob; endure the hot sun in the heat of the day; even climbing a sycamore tree, to simply get a glimpse of this Jesus — this Jesus who, among Zacchaeus' prestigious crowd, was considered a bit weird and suspect. What was motivating Zacchaeus???

My guess is that Zacchaeus, in spite of all his wealth and power – deep down, in the pit of his stomach – was empty, probably very lonely, surely anxious and fundamentally unhappy.

Zacchaeus had "a hole in his soul" and no matter how much he tried to hide it and fill it up with the good life of comfort and pleasure, he yearned for something deeper, more meaningful and fulfilling... .

Zacchaeus had heard the stories about Jesus: Jesus' message of finding "*life giving water;*" of *deep thirst and desire being quenched;* Zacchaeus had probably heard of "*the Pearl of great price;*" and heard the caution "... *where your treasure is, that is where your heart is...*"

Also, things like: "*You fool! This very night your life will be taken from you and where will all this stored up wealth of yours go?*" And: "*What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose one's soul in the process?*"

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Sisters and brothers, the Zacchaeus story teaches us one of the key elements of a healthy spirituality: *If you want to grow — you have to let go!*
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It seems that the pain in the soul of Zacchaeus was so strong that he was ready and willing to let go of everything: his wealthy secure way of life (supported, by the way, on the backs of others), his pride, arrogance and dishonesty.

To connect with Jesus – to a new life – a new creation: let go...; let go...; let go.... Very hard for us to do, but there will be no growth, no change, no healing in our individual lives, our families, our church, our nation, our world without it.

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As we celebrate the 11th Anniversary of our Parish, I can't think of a more beautiful example of "Letting go and letting God," than the birthing of All Saints. As I'm fond of saying, from the painful closing of Our Lady of Solace and Saint Therese — from the ashes — our Charter Members, many of who are among the 218 deceased who we have buried from the Parish in these 11 years, had the courage, the faith, to let go and cross over into the unknown and to give it a try... despite hurts resentments, doubts and even anger, ...and here we are today! From the painful and even unjust closings of St. Andrew's and St. Mary's, Jamesville, sisters and brothers – who often didn't know anyone here – in faith and courage crossed over, ...and here we are today! And since those days, folks from all over the area and beyond (we have folks from Oswego, Rome, Utica...) with courage and faith have crossed over. In these 11 years we are the only parish in the city of Syracuse that is growing. Our experience at All Saints is a metaphor for a healthy spiritual life as disciples of Jesus.

As we look to the future – in an institutional church that continues to face overwhelming challenges – we can be sure that we will continue to be a source of light and hope and salt and yeast on this little spot of holy ground in the southeast side, ***IF*** we stay focused on Jesus and His mission, expressed in our Mission Statement: *In the Spirit of Vatican II, All Saints Parish is an open and welcoming Catholic Christian community joyfully grounded in the Eucharist, that strives to live the Gospel call to holiness and loving service to all. Guided by our values of: inclusivity, diversity, continuity, evangelization, and growth.*

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Sisters and brothers, this will only happen if we – as a community – continue to be surprised by the Spirit and avoid getting stuck in our ways – avoid getting too comfortable or thinking we're better than others... ***but*** *be willing to continue to change.*

- ❖ Who would have imagined 11 years ago that we as a Parish would now be blessed with over 200 Congolese refugees and new Americans? Graced by their deep faith through unimaginable suffering – especially at a moment when our country is closing the door on refugees and immigrants crossing over... .

- ❖ Who would have imagined even one year ago that we would be blessed with our sanctuary family: Guillaume and Guy Guy, Valentine and Daniela... and a little one on the way!

The key is “welcome” ...radical welcome... which means not expecting those who join us to “assimilate” into the Parish, but rather, that we expect ourselves as a community to change because of their presence. Every time we welcome a new person, is a chance to change and grow... .

The Greek philosopher Apollinaire wrote:

“Come to the edge! No, I will fall!
Come to the edge! No, I will fall!”

They came to the edge...
He pushed them...
And, they flew!”

As our Parish approaches a new decade of the 21st century let us be open to how the Holy Spirit might push us over the edge!

Amen!