

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, October 30, 2022
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle C

When I was a kid, I used to climb trees. I loved climbing trees – in fact, I was good at it. My family used to live in a place where there were many fruit trees – mango, avocado, coconut and many other tropical fruit trees.

Aside from picking fruits, I used to climb a tree when I wanted to be alone – and that was often. Even when I was just a kid, I was already sentimental. When I felt lonely, I would climb the tree; and when my parents reprimanded me or were mad at me, I also climbed a tree. The tree became like a “retreat place” or even like a refuge for me. I would also climb a tree when I wanted to hide from my parents (to avoid some chores!)

Today’s gospel describes Zacchaeus climbing a sycamore tree. Allow me to focus on this homily on the sycamore tree, on Zacchaeus climbing the tree, and on Zacchaeus climbing down from the tree. Allow me also to borrow a part of the reflection from the book *Homilies of Father Earl Meyer*: A sycamore tree is a fruit tree. It is easy to climb such a tree and then sit on a lower branch. Early Christians saw the meaning of the sycamore tree in this gospel narrative as allegorical - meaning, it reveals a hidden meaning.

The tree was a means to faith. Zacchaeus could not see Jesus because of the crowd and because of his short stature. His being of short stature is not so much a description of his physical dimensions, but of his inner spirit. He was small in faith. The crowd is symbolic of his busy, distracted life. His failure to see Jesus over the crowd is a symbol of his failure to look beyond his busy life, to see beyond his material world and lucrative tax business. The sycamore tree was, for Zacchaeus, a means to faith. He climbed the tree to see beyond his crowded daily life. And once high in the tree, his perspective was then the vision of faith. There he saw Jesus. There he discovered his

need of Christ. Zacchaeus in the tree is the Christian at prayer. But Christ would not let Zacchaeus remain up there in the tree. He told him to come down.

Zacchaeus' faith was not simply for his personal comfort. He was called to transform that faith into action. He was to do justice for the wrongs he had done and to share his wealth – especially the wealth of his faith.

Just like Zacchaeus, we can be lost in the crowd. When we are lost in the crowded world of our busy lives, when we are badly affected by certain events and overwhelmed with personal problems, when we are haunted by guilt and regrets, and burdened by worries and fears, when we are distracted by worldly things and diverted from what truly matters...we need to climb a spiritual sycamore tree. We need to climb it in order to see that there is more to life than running after material wealth, political power, social status, public approval, sensual pleasure.

Moreover, we need to climb a spiritual sycamore tree because of our “spiritual smallness.” We need to climb it to gain a new perspective – to have the eyes of faith and to see Jesus. The “spiritual sycamore tree” I am referring to might be a recollection or retreat you need to give time to. Or a regular prayer time you need to make for yourself. The principal sycamore trees of faith for us Catholics are the Sacraments. Yet, we cannot just remain on top of our spiritual sycamore trees. Just like Zacchaeus, we need to come down from it.

We need to transform our faith into action. Faith always leads to action. The blessings we gain from climbing our spiritual sycamore trees are not designed just to make us secure in our faith. They are to empower us to live as faithful Christians on main street – the street of personal involvement and active participation in the life and mission of the Church, the street of ministry and service in the community. They are to empower us to bring our faith anew to our daily duties and responsibilities. Having gained a new perspective, having been refreshed by our spiritual experience from the sycamore tree, let us come down and transform our faith into action.