

NOVEMBER 18 FATHER FRANCIS SALASAR

A priest once told his congregation, “Next week, I’m preaching on honesty, so I want you all to read Mark 17.” The following Sunday, he asked, “How many of you read Mark 17?” Almost every hand went up. The priest smiled and said, “Wonderful! You’re just the people I need to talk to—because there is no Mark 17!”

That’s a bit of a Zacchaeus moment—when our little white lies or hidden corners of life are suddenly exposed by the truth. But instead of condemnation, Jesus offers us what He offered Zacchaeus: mercy and a new beginning.

The story of Zacchaeus is a lot like our own. We live busy lives, surrounded by things to do and things to have, but we still feel restless. There’s always something missing, something we keep searching for. That feeling is at the center of today’s Gospel and at the center of our faith.

Picture the scene: Jericho is full of excitement. Jesus, known for His miracles and teachings, is coming through town. The streets are crowded, people are calling out to Him, and in the middle of it all is a man named Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus isn’t just short; he’s also someone people look down on. He’s a tax collector, the kind of person most avoid. He takes people’s money, keeps some for himself, and acts friendly about it. He’s wealthy, but not well-liked.

And yet, something in him stirs when he hears that Jesus is nearby. Maybe he’s tired of the loneliness that comes with sin and

seclusion. Perhaps the weight of wealth feels heavier than it once did. He wasn't lacking money, but he was lacking meaning. He wasn't hungry for food, but for peace. Whatever it is, he runs ahead and climbs a tree.

Imagine a grown man—a wealthy, powerful man—so desperate that he climbs a tree like a child, just to catch a glimpse of Jesus passing by. The scene is almost humorous, but it reveals a profound truth: for all his money and status, Zacchaeus was deeply restless. Something within him knew that his accomplishments had failed to fill the emptiness inside.

Many of us can relate. We work hard, build careers, and fill our days, yet a quiet hunger remains for something deeper—a lasting joy and a real peace that success alone cannot provide.

This longing is not a sign of failure. It is a sign of faith waiting to be awakened. It is our heart's way of telling us, "You were made for more." And the beautiful truth of this story is that while Zacchaeus thought he was searching for Jesus, Jesus was already searching for him.

When Jesus reached the tree, He didn't just pass by. He stopped, looked up, and called Zacchaeus by name: "Come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." Notice that Jesus looks up—not down—at the sinner. He sees past Zacchaeus's sin and directly into his potential, his longing, and his desire to be seen.

This is how God meets our restlessness. He doesn't scold us for being lost or for searching in the wrong places. Instead, He meets us right where we are—in the "tree" we've climbed—and invites us down.

So, what is the "tree" you've climbed? What are you clinging to, hoping it will give you a better view or a sense of control?

Perhaps your tree is pride—the insistence that “I don’t need help.”

Maybe it’s fear—the worry that “If people knew the real me, they’d reject me.” It could be comfort—the reservation that “I’ll follow Jesus, but not if it costs too much.” Or maybe it’s the tree of old wounds—clinging to unforgiveness, resentment, or past hurt.

Whatever your tree may be, the good news is this: Jesus is standing beneath it today. He is looking up at you, not down on you, and He says, “Come down. I want to be with you.”

He doesn’t just want to make a brief visit to your life; He wants to live in it. He wants to walk into your home, your relationships, your work, and your heart—to bring transformation and peace, starting today. Like Zacchaeus, let us be open to that invitation and welcome the Lord into our daily lives.