

## Reflection

- Good morning everyone and a very special welcome to the students in our religious education program and all of the children here who are members of the CYO Basketball Program.
- Growing up I loved playing basketball and I have to admit I am a lifetime NY Knicks fan – so pray for me because all Knick fans suffer.
- But I am also a big fan of Steph Curry the All-Star player on the Golden State Warriors.
- You may or may not know he is very outspoken about his Christian faith.
- He and his wife actually started a foundation called: Eat, Learn and Play so that poor families can access to food, education and recreation. They actually build neighborhood playgrounds in poor areas of California.
- Recently, I read a magazine article about Steph Curry. Did you know he writes a bible verse on his basketball shoes? If you look close at pictures you will see the words: Philippians 4:13. That verse from the bible says: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”. He puts it there as a reminder.
- The article went on to ask him why he pounds his chest and points upward after almost every three-point shot he makes. Curry said: He hits his chest to remind himself that his heart belongs to God. And he points upward to heaven to acknowledge how important God’s presence and God’ love is in his life. That he is playing and living for God.
- This is the same message we hear in today’s readings.
- God’ love and presence in our lives is precious. God is close by and interested in us. God wants to be part of our lives – we just need to invite Him in!

- And when we let God in He blesses us, He changes us for the better – making us kind, loving, giving people.
- We see an example of this in today's Gospel reading.
- Today's gospel starts with a very funny scene. Jesus is surrounded by a very large crowd as he enters a town. On the outer ring of that crowd we see a short little fellow named Zacchaeus, hopping up and down trying but unable to see Jesus. It is just too crowded and he is not tall enough to see Jesus.
- But Zacchaeus is determined so he cleverly figures out the direction in which Jesus is travelling and he runs ahead and climbs up a tree so he can get a clear look at Jesus when Jesus gets to that spot.
- But in this Gospel, St. Luke is doing more than telling us a funny story about a clever little man. Zacchaeus is a person desperately wanting to see Jesus. Why? Was he just curious? Or was there something more?
- To understand why Zacchaeus was so determined to see Jesus we need to know a little more about him.
- Zacchaeus would have been well known to the people in that crowd. He was the Chief Tax Collector in the area. Tax collectors were hated by the people of Jesus' time. They worked for the Roman government and their job was to collect money from the working people and give it over to the government. If that wasn't bad enough, most tax collectors, including Zacchaeus, overcharged people and kept the extra money for themselves. They became very wealthy by cheating people.
- The people viewed the tax collectors as traitors, and first-rate crooks that took money away from hard working people. Zacchaeus was looked at as a sinner for whom there was no hope.

- St. Luke tells us it was something more than curiosity that led Zacchaeus to climb that tree. He may have had a lot of money but he was lonely, unloved, an outcast from the community. He was probably feeling guilty for being so dishonest. He needed that love, that forgiveness and healing only God can give. Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus and wanted to know more. Wanted to know if Jesus could forgive him, could change him. His heart was open and ready to let Jesus in.
- And Jesus knew it! Jesus seized the opportunity. Jesus can see into the hearts of every person. He knows our joys, our dreams, our needs – especially our need for the love of God. He knows everything about us. Somehow, Zacchaeus sensed this truth and put his faith in it.
- Let's look carefully at what happened the moment Jesus and Zacchaeus meet. There's a great joy that both Jesus and Zacchaeus show in meeting each other. We hear Jesus shout joyfully: "Hey Zacchaeus come down quickly, I am staying at your house today!"
- Zacchaeus almost flies out of that tree in great joy. He opens his heart and let's Jesus into his life.
- With a simple word from Jesus, Zacchaeus' life changed forever. Zacchaeus promised to repay anyone whom he had cheated, and he committed to giving half of his money to help the poor. Zacchaeus received that love, forgiveness and healing he so desperately longed for and it changed him for the better.
- So, what does the story of Zacchaeus mean for us in our life? Our world today?
- I'd offer this: What Jesus did for Zacchaeus, He is able to do for each of us. The same love, the forgiveness, the

understanding, the acceptance and healing is there for the taking.

- But notice, God's love was there from the beginning but Zacchaeus had to do something to open himself to that love.
- And he did. He climbed a tree and before he knew it Jesus was a guest in his house and that Guest transformed him.
- Zacchaeus discovered that true happiness was not found in money or things or just looking out for yourself. Its found in God's love and God's presence in us. It's found in loving others (isn't that when we feel most alive?)
- So today's gospel challenges us to ask ourselves an important question: What is the tree we need to climb to see Jesus? In other words: What must we do to be more open to God. What must we do to invite God into our hearts and allow Him to change us into better people?
- Do we need to spend more time alone with God in prayer?
- Do we need to stop worrying so much and trust God more?
- Do we need to trust in God's timetable, instead of ours?
- Do we need to come to Mass more often? Even when we are not required? (Perfect chance this week: Tuesday is all Saints Day, Wednesday is All souls Day)
- And if we invite god in , He will change us.
- We will become more forgiving people. Especially that person that really gets under our skin.
- We will be more open to accept others who are different from us?
- We will give more time to those in need (poor, sick, lonely)
- The big question is: Do we want to see Jesus badly enough to climb the tree. To prepare and be changed?
- God wants us to. The last sentence in today's Gospel tells us how badly God wants us to invite Him in to be a part of our

lives when it says God sent Jesus to “seek and save what was lost”.

- No matter how small or unimportant we may sometimes think we are, the truth is we are precious to God. Each one of us is important to God. Your life matters – never let anyone tell you otherwise. God loves us dearly.
- I mentioned that this Tuesday we celebrate the “All Saints Day”. The saints were human like us. Lived here. Passed through the same life we are living. And amidst all the temptations and craziness the world can throw at us, they heard God’s call, opened their hearts and let God in. We look to the saints for encouragement and proof of God’s great love and power to change people for the better. So be sure to do something special Tuesday: come to Mass, read about a saint, pray the Litany of saints Prayer (you can google it).
- I want to conclude with this thought: In a few short minutes we will have a real encounter with Jesus, just like Zacchaeus and all the saints did. Ours will take place at that altar where Jesus becomes really present.
- At that moment of encounter with Jesus, when that host is placed in our hand (or for our 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders when you come forward for the blessing) remember He is looking at us , in our tree, and saying: “Today, I must stay at your house”.
- Like Zacchaeus may we welcome Him with great joy!