

*Homily of Archbishop Leo Cushley*

*End of the Year of Faith, St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh*

*3 November 2013*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

My dear young people,

Zaccheus is a bit of a star in the Gospels. His is one of the most famous and beloved stories of the early Church. He is introduced to us by St Luke very quickly and we learn that he is the senior tax collector and a wealthy man. We also learn what height he is - he's a wee guy. He's so short he can't see Jesus for the crowd: but he doesn't have his servants make space for him or push the people the aside: instead, in spite of his dignity and importance, he runs ahead, and he even climbs a sycamore just to catch a glimpse of Jesus. You can tell this is a famous story among the early Christians – because we even know what kind of a tree Zaccheus climbed. So the first thing that we notice about Zaccheus is that he's curious, he is driven, he really wants to see Jesus. Zaccheus is curious.

Now, we already saw that he is a senior tax collector and a wealthy man. He's important, well known, not liked very much at all – because he's a collaborator with the hated Romans – and he's short. So they laugh at him, he's a figure of fun. But this story just gets better and better. Jesus doesn't get invited by this hated little man – instead Jesus actually invites himself to dinner at Zaccheus's house. And the reaction? Zaccheus "hurries" down and welcomes Jesus joyfully. And all of this has nothing to do with Zaccheus.

Zaccheus didn't invite Jesus; Jesus invited himself into Zaccheus's life. All Zaccheus had to do was stand there and be curious - and Jesus came to him. But Zaccheus meets him more than half way - he welcomes Jesus with a frenetic joy. So this is the second thing we see about Zaccheus: his meeting with Jesus has filled him with an incredible enthusiasm and joy.

And he welcomes him into his home.

Now, the crowd, having laughed at him poked fun and criticized Zaccheus, now stop criticizing *him* and start to criticise *Jesus*. All of a sudden it's not funny anymore. Why is Jesus consorting with people like Zaccheus? But again, Zaccheus comes right back at them and reacts as a disciple would. He "stands his ground" as everyone criticizes Jesus for "going to a sinner's house". He says that he is "determined" to give half his property to the poor and four times the amount to anyone who claims to have been cheated by him. So now there is a third thing we see about Zaccheus: his generosity and his courage. And it's not just talk either. He's going to prove his love with unheard of generosity - in fact I can't think offhand of anyone that is as generous in the Gospels as Zaccheus.

So, when we step back for a moment, we can see that Zaccheus, in very rapid order indeed, has gone on one great whirlwind trip right here before our eyes. He is a despised little tax collector that nobody likes. But he goes on a journey: he starts by being curious about Jesus, to being enthusiastic and joyful, and finishes being generous and courageous. And at the end of it, what is Jesus' judgment of this trip? He declares: "Today salvation has come to this house... for the Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost".

In fact, the presence of Jesus has changed Zaccheus, completely, utterly, once and for all. And it all started just because he was a wee guy that was too short to see Jesus.

We listen to this wonderful story as we conclude in Scotland the Year of Faith. I know that during this year a lot of work has been done in our parishes and schools to unpack a substantial but very useful touchstone of our faith: the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It's this thick, and it looks expensive, but I got a copy of it for precisely one dollar from Abebooks.com when I worked in New York. So don't think you'll break the bank by tracking one down. It is also something that should be on everyone's shelf. If you want to know about the beauty of our faith, if you want to know why we are here and what we ought to do about it – you could do a lot worse than go and buy a copy of the Catechism, even just to have it there on the shelf as a point of reference. It should be like having the Bible and a good dictionary in the house: it should be unimaginable not having one handy.

When I was getting ready to speak to you, I was told that a lot has been achieved through examining the four pillars of the Catechism: those four pillars are Believing, Celebrating, Living and Praying our Faith. Believing, Celebrating, Living and Praying: I liked those points and I'll tell you why. I liked them because of what they are not. They are not about talking. They're not about talking all the time, but about doing it and living it. The Year of Faith is supposed to be about Jesus Christ, it is about getting curious about him, getting enthusiastic about knowledge for someone who transforms our lives from within, so that we gain a generosity and courage that sometimes we don't even realise the source of, but that will surely bring out the best in us.

Does Zaccheus believe? I think it's pretty clear that he does. Does he celebrate? Yes, he's one of the most spontaneous and joyful people who celebrates the Lord's physical presence among him and his family. Does he live the faith? Well, I'd say if you went home today and gave away half your property for the sake of Jesus Christ, I would say you qualified. Does he pray? That is one point on which the Gospel is silent: but it is a reasonable guess that Zaccheus went on to become a famous convert and a leading figure among the Christians of Jericho after Christ's resurrection, and then he would surely have learned to pray and to be an example to others.

As it ends, the Year of Faith actually furnishes us with a starting point. The Year has been an opportunity to unpack something of our rich, deep faith, a very old faith, but always new as well. Some have seized that opportunity; others have let it slide. Whether you grasped the chance this year or not, from now on look to Zaccheus and his wonderful, funny, encouraging example. He makes a journey we should want to make: he makes a journey of faith right before our eyes – and it takes him one afternoon and ten verses of the Gospel. I think for young people especially, Zaccheus is a great example. At each point of Zaccheus's journey of faith there is something for each one of you. Are you curious yet? Are you enthusiastic or joyful about your faith? Have you learned to stand your ground? Are you generous and courageous yet?

Dear young people, I never fail to be impressed by your goodness in the face of all the temptations you must confront and of your willingness to search for God. The world tells you not to bother to search for God, to fall in love instead with money and sex and the culture of death. But again and again, you look at this barren landscape, you look at the shallow, pointless life the world offers and you say, No: I want something better than that. I want to

love God, to serve him and to lead a happy, coherent life in harmony with people and with all God's good creation.

That is what happened to Zaccheus today. He was changed for the better by finding Jesus Christ. He had loads of money and an easy life – and turned his back on all of it, because he wanted something better. So think about being like him. Search for Jesus, get curious about him, and you will be filled with joy when you meet him. Be joyful in your faith. And above all, don't be half-hearted. Instead, be generous and courageous with your lives. And the prayers of all of us accompany you on your journey of faith.