

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a special grace and privilege to welcome Archbishop Cordileone to St. Pius X Parish this weekend. The Archbishop will be presiding at a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament to pray for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. This Holy Hour will be held in Marin and San Francisco counties as well. I am grateful to Archbishop Cordileone for leading us in prayer. I would ask that you attend our Holy Hour for Vocations today, Sunday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> at 3:00 pm. At each Mass since becoming a priest, I ask that we pray for more priestly and religious vocations in the Universal Prayer. Vocations are fostered and nurtured by the Catholic community and your prayers and active promotion of such vocations are an indispensable part in encouraging young men and women to serve the Church through ministerial priesthood and religious life.

During his pastoral visit to the United States in September of 1987, St. Pope John Paul II reflected on his own call to priestly service. It is a very powerful message worthy of our prayer and consideration. "I am often asked, especially by young people, why I became a priest. Maybe some of you would like to ask the same question. Let me try briefly to reply. I must begin by saying that it is impossible to explain entirely. For it remains a mystery, even to myself. How does one explain the ways of God? Yet, I know that, at a certain point in my life, I became convinced that Christ was saying to me what he had said to thousands before me: 'Come follow me!' There was a clear sense that what I heard in my heart was no human voice, nor was it just an idea of my own. Christ was calling me to serve him as a priest.

And you can probably tell that I am deeply grateful to God for my vocation to the priesthood. Nothing means more to me or gives me greater joy than to celebrate Mass each day and to serve God's people in the Church. That has been true ever since the day of my ordination as a priest. Nothing has ever changed this, even becoming Pope."

In today's Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul tells of his prayers and encouragement as followers of Jesus to live up to the dignity God has given us. As fellow Christians, Paul's prayer is indeed ours as well: to encourage one another in living as best we can the call to be witnesses to God's kingdom here and now, in the reality of our own time. We make ourselves "worthy of God's calling and fulfill every good purpose" first by being people of prayer and faith, remembering even in the smallest details of life that God is in the beginning and end of all things, the alpha and the omega. We do this by respecting ourselves and others, by loving others by our words and deeds, most especially when it is difficult to do so. We do this by having the humility to turn to the Lord in faith like Zacchaeus, whose powerful story we read in Luke's Gospel.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector during the Roman occupation, and this meant he was a subversive and despised member of society. Yet, he is an example of how a genuine desire for conversion can transform even the darkest and most troubled of hearts. He wanted to meet Jesus; as a leader, Zacchaeus surely knew of Jesus' healing ministry. Being short of stature, Zacchaeus climbs the sycamore tree; seeing him and sensing his great faith, Jesus beckons this sinner to himself. "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." Jesus is rebuked by the onlookers - yet again, this Messiah is breaking all conventions.

They don't get what we by our Christian faith must know - that Jesus came to seek and save the lost, the broken-hearted, the wounded and the sick. The encounter of our Lord with Zacchaeus brought about a transformation: in a concrete expression of his gratitude, this tax collector offers to give half of his possessions to the poor.

There is a compelling modern-day example of redemption. Chris Herren was a prep basketball star in Massachusetts - star player at Boston College before being expelled for drug use. He played at Fresno State then briefly for the Denver Nuggets and Boston Celtics. For the next several years, his life of hope and success spiraled into a deep darkness as drugs and alcohol led him ultimately into homelessness. All the while, he had married and had three beautiful children. The drugs continued to be a nightmare for him and his family.

At age 32, after a ten-year addiction, he was told to leave his family; his counselor told him to call his wife and tell the kids he had been killed in a car accident. Enough heartbreak!!! Something happened when faced with this scenario—call it grace. Chris says, “At 32 years old, after ten solid years in addiction, that was probably my best option, and that seemed like what I should do. But since that moment when I said maybe that should be my plan, I’ve been sober. I got down on my knees, I prayed that night, and I’ve done everything that I’ve been asked to do...to this point.” Chris was in treatment, fragile though it can be, and is now five years clean and sober. He began a foundation called Hoop Dreams which instructs youth in the fundamentals of basketball and in life as well.

Chris's story is the Zacchaeus story: lost in his own intense sickness and brokenness, he ran up the sycamore tree and Jesus called him down. Let us not be afraid to climb the sycamore tree ourselves, seek out the Lord and have him say of us, “Today salvation has come to this house because this man is a descendant of Abraham!”

--Fr. Tom