

Called Down from the Tree

Last weekend I was staying in a small town that I love to visit each October around Halloween; the highlight of the weekend is the huge Halloween parade. The problem is whenever I go to the parade I can't see due to the huge crowds lining the street, which means I spend the time struggling to see the various floats and musicians, largely missing it all.

The difficulty of being short...the "Zacchaeus" syndrome. But this year it was different. I ended up with a clear view of *everything*! What a difference a parade with a view makes.

I saw all the floats and bands and entertaining acts that passed me by with the children laughing and smiling stretching out their hands to catch the flying candy being tossed from the floats. It was wonderful and fun to see families together, with grandparents peppered throughout, smiling from "coast to coast."

But I noticed something else in my privileged position: all the darkened windows above the storefronts with no signs of people looking down at the festivities. These are apartments that are rented on a short-term basis to people who come and go, places not well kept or truly lived in.

In my spot along the parade route, I saw the event with new eyes, with the darkened and seemingly empty rooms above having a clear presence amidst the throng on the street below.

Like Zacchaeus, I was called down from straining to see the event to entering the scene in all of its shapes and colors. As Zacchaeus' eyes were opened, he saw the world with new eyes and it began when he "came



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down" from the tree and entered the crowd; he joined the parade and became a part of its life. And then Jesus did the unthinkable: he invited himself in the home of Zacchaeus for dinner, an action that restored Zacchaeus to life with mercy over his sinful past.

Yes, wonderful things happen when we sit down and eat together. Zacchaeus responded by living out his conversion...his new way of seeing life: to sell half of his belongings and pay back extorted money four times over!!! In calling Zacchaeus down and having dinner with him in his own home caused the religious leaders to be scandalized. Jesus was trying to get these self-righteous leaders to "come down" from their perch of judgment

and "see" life and God and people in a whole new way. But their eyes were closed...

Jesus is calling us down from our own trees of security and comfort and isolation, to join the human race by entering the crowd, joining the parade, inviting unlikely people over for dinner or out to a restaurant.

My experience of the parade was a haunting one, not because of the frightful masks and costumes (vampires were big this year), but because of the darkened windows above; the unknown inhabitants were an invisible part of the parade...but they were there. I was hoping that they were in the crowd but had the feeling that most of them weren't.

Whatever the case, I saw the entire scene and not just what was going on at my own level. In a touch of irony, I was struggling to see any signs of life through these darkened windows. For a brief moment my own inner "mask" was removed and my experience along the parade route expanded.

At every Eucharist, Jesus invites us to a banquet, nourishing us with his very Presence, expanding our hearts with divine mercy... destroying all the chains that bind us. And we remove not only our own mask but the mask we have covered God's face with to see life in a whole new way.

Our response: to mend fences, give generously and be grateful.