

Deacon Mike's Sermon for October 30, 2016

On May 11th, 1873, a 33 year old Father Joseph Damien landed on Molokai, Hawaii.

A disease ridden crowd suffering from leprosy also known as Hanson's disease, gathered at the landing.

This was the location that the government would send those afflicted with Leprosy to literally fend for themselves and die.

For more than a decade Damien would clean wounds, bandage ulcers, even amputate gangrene infested limbs.

Previously, the dead had been thrown in a ravine or buried in graves so shallow that wild pigs ravaged the corpses.

Damien dug graves, built more than 1600 coffins during his years on Molokai.

After 11 years it became evident that Fr. Damien had contracted leprosy.

He persisted in his tireless activity until three weeks before his death.

When those by his bedside grieved that he was leaving them orphaned.

Damien replied, “Oh no! If I have any credit with God, I’ll intercede for everyone.”

On his tomb stone is engraved “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

One of the greatest diseases, Mother Theresa tells us, is “to be nobody to anybody.”

Perhaps this day someone in your family, your workplace, someone maybe in this faith community, at the hospitals, nursing homes, or in our neighborhoods is feeling like a nobody.

In the spirit of Blessed Damien, recognize the sacred spirit of that person and do something that affirms this person’s worth.

Jesus, as we heard in the Gospel today, recognized that worth even in a Zacchaeus.

He was an especially hated man as an especially successful tax collector and therefore a hated man in a Jewish culture.

He was beyond redemption in their eyes.

Zacchaeus was particularly hated because he had collaborated with foreign oppressors, the Romans, to collect their taxes.

Tax collectors to the Jews were as vampires, who collaborated with the Roman system of “tax farming”.

The Romans wanted to collect as much tax as they could without tying up their own personnel.

So they recruited locals and gave them a percentage of what was collected.

The more that they could wring out of the people, the more they could keep for themselves.

So Zacchaeus profited off of his countrymen's misfortune.

In doing so, they helped raise the funds necessary to finance the brutal repression of the chosen people of God, by the pagan Romans.

Obviously, Zacchaeus was repugnant to the Jewish people of his time. They saw it as though he was an enemy of God himself.

He was a traitor!

Zacchaeus must have felt as though there was no hope for him.

The tug that Zacchaeus felt inside was the grace of God drawing him to his Son.

Zacchaeus was truly a prodigal son. Yet, Jesus had already known of the potential goodness of this man.

With just a simple invitation to come down out of the tree made all of the difference, new life filled Zacchaeus thru God's grace.

Jesus only asked for a meal and a place to stay that evening, but the heart of Zacchaeus opened up completely.

He announced he would make amends if he had defrauded anyone for surely he had, thru the fourfold restitution which was the Jewish tradition in cases of flagrant theft.

Furthermore, he committed himself to giving half of his fortune to the poor. Imagine the happiness of our Lord!

The first reading tells us in prayer: God, "You love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made."

Although God's love was there before Zacchaeus was even born, Zacchaeus had to do something to open himself to that love.

And he did. He climbed that tree and before he knew it, Jesus was a guest at his home.

Not only was Jesus his guest, but something else wonderful happened to Zacchaeus.

He had discovered that genuine happiness was not in material goods but in God's love and in loving others.

The gospel describes Zacchaeus as small in stature, but his encounter with Jesus allowed him to grow – not in stature but in maturity, love and joy.

What tree do we have to climb to see Jesus?

In what way do we have to go out of our way to allow God to take possession of us?

This is risky, think about it.....

Do we have to spend more time in prayer?

Do we have to rise above our fears and mistrust and allow God to have more control in our lives?

Maybe we need to make that commitment to fulfill our obligation to attend Sunday Mass every Sunday and on Holy days of obligation such as this Tuesday which is All Saints Day.

When we don't fulfill our obligation we incur the pain of sin unless we have a very serious reason for not doing so?

Do we believe in his words, that we "must eat of his flesh and drink of his blood to have life in us that we find only at Mass?

Do we need to forgive or be forgiven?

Do we recognize the Zacchaeus' in our lives?

Brothers and Sisters, the tree that we need to climb in order to see Jesus better may take many forms.

Do we want to see Jesus badly enough to climb it?

No matter how small we may think we are, no matter how bad we may have been, no matter how insignificant we may feel, God loves us and he offers us his life and friendship---forever!

Today here at Mass he is inviting himself into our lives. He wants to dine with us this day.

Jesus yearns to invite so many of those who are no longer among us to dine with him too.

Fr. Damien invited and dined with the lepers feeding them the "Bread of Life".

In the Book of Revelations, Jesus states, "Behold I stand at the door and knock."

How far will we open the door of our hearts to let him in?

Will we knock on the doors of our separated brethren for Jesus, inviting them to dine with us?

Fr. Damien of Molokai pray for us? Amen!

JMJ