

Throughout my years of school, I was always one of the shortest people in my class. Even as a priest I sometimes find that my altar servers are bigger than I am. I try to look at the bright side. I can buy clothes cheaper in boyswear than in menswear, and it doesn't take me as long to shower as other people need. I used to advocate that taller people should form an organization called Height Watchers to overcome their problems. But being short has its shortcomings: for example, I am always the last one to find out it's raining. A lot of short adults make up for their height by talking in a loud voice, as if the ears of taller people are so far away they can't hear you unless you shout. Children all know this problem; they can't see what's going on the way big people can, and when you're short others overlook you and act as if you don't count.

The patron saint of the vertically challenged is Zacchaeus, the tax collector who appears only in Luke's gospel and only in this story. Most people – especially children – remember Zacchaeus because he was short and because he climbed a tree. He has other virtues, and Luke points these out, but they are as easily overlooked as Zacchaeus himself.

For example, Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. We don't know why. It might have been simple curiosity, but it was probably something more. He surely wanted to see Jesus with the eyes of faith, but he first had to see him with the eyes in his face. He was seeking Jesus, but he did not know that Jesus was also seeking him. Jesus says at the end of today's gospel that he came to seek and to save what was lost.

And it does appear that Zacchaeus had been lost. He was a tax collector, and in those days he earned a living by cheating people out of the money they thought they were paying as a tax. He offers to repay any of his extortions four times over, and he promises to give half his possessions to the poor. Zacchaeus was a wealthy man, and he obtained his wealth in evil ways. But Jesus came to save what was lost, and Zacchaeus becomes one of the most generous men in Jericho.

If you ever feel spiritually short, if you ever want to see more of Jesus, there are two lessons to be learned. First, you may have to climb a tree. You may have to do something a little unusual in order to get the view you want; you might have to go someplace different or allow yourself to be ridiculed by others.

And second, once you do see Jesus, be prepared. He may inspire you to be more honorable than you intended. You may start giving more to the poor and making up for past offenses – four times over. Seeing more of Jesus requires effort before and after. But he will help. All the time that we are trying to get a better look at him, he is already trying to get a better look at us.

And now I'm happy to follow this piece of advice about public speaking: "Whatever you say, be short."