

HOMILY 31ST SUN OT YRC 2019

How many of you know Alice Cooper? When he was at the height of her worldwide fame, rock musician Alice Cooper's life was out of control. He drank a bottle of whiskey a day. This almost destroyed his marriage to his wife of 25 years, Sheryl. We idolize the rich and famous in our culture. They are our royalty. You may be saying to yourself, I know wealth and fame do not lead to happiness but I would sure like to try it some time. But Alice Cooper knew that it was not leading to happiness in his life so he started going to church with his wife every Sunday, and before long he felt as if God was speaking to him. Soon, Alice Cooper made an amazing change in his life. This is what he said about his conversion: "I have talked to some big stars about this, some really horrific characters, and you'd be surprised. The ones that you would think are the farthest gone are the ones that are the most apt to listen."

In the Gospel reading today we hear about Zacchaeus. He was in a similar situation as Alice Cooper. He was a chief tax collector, which made him a very wealthy man, but this wealth did not satisfy his deepest needs. He was seen as a traitor and a thief by everyone. He was alone. And it seems that out of curiosity, he wanted to see Jesus. He was willing to act foolishly, hanging from a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus. I do not think he knew what to expect. And when Jesus sees him, he reaches out to him and meets him where he is. Jesus does not judge him, but recognizes his dignity as a human person. In the eyes of Jesus we all count. Jesus presence not his judgment leads to his conversion. I think Alice Cooper was in the same position. He was desperate, the money and fame did not satisfy his deepest needs, so out of curiosity he decided to go to church with his wife not knowing what to expect. It was Jesus presence not his judgment that leads to his conversion.

Sometimes people need to be desperate with nowhere else to turn before they turn to Jesus. I think Zacchaeus just happened to be in the right place at the right time, but I think Alice Cooper's wife

Sheryl was probably the one that led him to Jesus. As Alice Cooper observed, the ones that are the furthest gone are the ones that are most apt to listen. Remember that when you encounter someone who seems desperate. They may be the most apt to listen to you. And when someone has a conversion, there is a ripple effect. The poor obviously benefitted materially from Zacchaeus conversion, but I wonder if he told the poor why he was giving them money and those he robbed why he was repaying them four times over? I wonder if he shared his story with other tax collectors. Sharing their conversion story may very well bring them to Jesus. When Alice Cooper shared his conversion experience with some of the big stars I am sure it had a great impact. I think the impact was much greater coming from Alice Cooper then it would have been coming from a priest.

As I look around the church I do not see Alice Cooper or Zacchaeus, but you may have been Alice Cooper or Zacchaeus like at some point in your life. If so, you have a story to tell. Do not keep it to yourself, create the ripple effect. And everyone here has a faith story to tell. Do not keep it to yourself. You can create a ripple effect as well. Story telling is extremely important. That is how we lead people to Jesus. We do not lead people to Jesus by discussing Church doctrine and dogma. That becomes important after people have found Jesus.

Some of you have done your homework and written your story. I thank you. Watch for your story in the bulletin. Some of you have told me that you are going to write your story, but I have not received it yet. I encourage all of you to write your story and email it to me. It does not have to be long, two pages double spaced. Let me know if we can publish it with your name or if you would like to remain anonymous. You may be leading someone to Jesus. Your story coming from you may have a much greater impact than a story coming from me. Someone may be just waiting to hear your story.