Jesus and Zacchaeus: An Encounter the Redefines Christian Ministry

The following homily was given by Marianne Duddy-Burke, Executive Director, DignityUSA, at the 2013 Call To Action Conference.

Does anyone have a sycamore tree?
Leave it to the CTA Liturgy Team to bring the Gospel to life by inviting the “Zacchaeus” of homilists to speak with you from behind this massive podium!

How many of us CTAers can also relate to this man who fears that he has a challenge that might separate him from what he sees as an answer to his spiritual hunger. For Zacchaeus, it’s his lack of stature, which makes it impossible for him to see Jesus through the crowds around him. For us, it may be being seen as too liberal, too feminist, too outspoken, not sufficiently attentive to official teaching. We may carry a label like undocumented, divorced and remarried, transgender, lesbian, bisexual, gay, queer, Latina/ Latino, Black, Asian, old, young, dis-abled, uneducated, poor, ill, lay, cleric, religious, single-parent, parent of an LGBT kid, non-Catholic, or something else that might set the crowd of those close to Jesus to grumbling. Like Zacchaeus, we, too feel that yearning to be seen and embraced for who we truly are. Many of us have done our own version of tree-climbing, exposing our vulnerabilities, finding ways to overcome the barrier, in order to have a relationship with Jesus. How thrilled we are when we get that call to share the sacred meal!

And like Zacchaeus, many of us have justified our right to be part of the crowd by showing just how well we understand the Gospel, demonstrating how we strive to show mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. All of this is good and right, and we certainly must continue our task of making the community that is the Church a reflection of the expansive openness and boundless love of our God.

But, as I prayed and reflected on this Gospel, I found that two challenges in it that were more difficult, at least for me, and, I suspect this may be true for many of us gathered here. The first was to flip the story so that rather than identifying as Zacchaeus, we stand in the place of Jesus. After all, as we are so often reminded, we, the baptized, the living Body of Christ, are the face, the hands and feet, the heart of Christ in our world today. We are to be the response to today’s spiritual hungers and human needs. And yet, I wonder, how aware are we of the Zacchaeuses in our lives? How often do we walk comfortably with our own crowd, failing to look up, and see the folks in the trees yearning to make a connection to something sacred? How well do we get beyond the initial impression to understand the need with which we are presented? Are we able to respond to the need, no matter who is putting it forth?

I must confess that I have long found Zacchaeus a pretty distasteful character. I kind of sided with the crowd, resenting Zacchaeus as a man who enriched himself by collaborating with an occupying government, squeezing taxes from the people to support their own oppression. In sitting with this story, however, Pope’s Francis question “Who am I to judge?” took on new meaning. Jesus did not respond to Zacchaeus’ lack of stature or his exploitive tendencies—the two characteristics deemed most significant by the author of the Lucan Gospel—or at least these factors did not become what defined the relationship. Jesus was able to recognize a human being with a profound need, and that is what he addressed in Zacchaeus. It was humbling to come face to face with my own biases, and to recognize that there are likely many times in the course of a day or a week I may not see a need that I am called on to address. The crowd surrounding Jesus certainly gave him many opportunities to heal, to teach, to comfort, to inspire. And yet, Jesus called out to a person beyond the margins, someone on an entirely different plane, a person who clearly did not fit in to the pack because it was that person who needed who he was and what he, uniquely, was able to offer.

Throughout this weekend, we have heard incredible testimonies from speakers whose ministry does not look like the Church we tend to envision when we say “Catholic.” We’ve heard from Adam Bucko about helping kids living on the street find their passions rather than being forced into programs designed to help them fit into molds that are comprehensible to a dominant culture. Our amazing panel speakers stretched the definition and locale of “ministry” in ways that create both amazing opportunities for us to claim our rightful place as ministers of the Gospel, and unmanageable challenges for any institution that tries to confine these.

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Letter from the executive director

The Year Ahead

Twenty-five year old Adam drove hundreds of miles with friends, slept in a sleeping bag on a parish hall floor, and volunteered in order to attend Call To Action’s 2013 national conference. A cradle Catholic who loves the church, Adam knows in his heart, like you, that the church can be more just and inclusive. Adam proclaimed the conference weekend “the best weekend of 2013!”

2013 will be a year to remember with thousands of Call To Action supporters around the country engaged in the sacred work that is acting for justice and building inclusive communities!

Call To Action’s 2013 annual conference, with its theme Living Our Baptismal Call, served as an important reminder that while the new tone coming from the throne of Peter is refreshing, you are the transformation for which our beloved church yearns. As conference liturgy homilist Marianne Duddy-Burke said so eloquently, our faith calls us to be “…the light that beckons those in darkness, the balm that heals those who are broken, and the food that satisfies everyone who is hungry.” May this reminder of our time together in November inspire us to live even more into our baptismal call in 2014.

As 2014 unfolds, we will be called again and again to rise up to counter injustice and to inspire Catholics to be the light that transforms our Church. While change permeates the air, there is much work to be done. There is much more work to be done, for example, in inviting all Catholic families to help us cultivate a church for them. The “Ministering to all Catholic Families” webinar series will give us an opportunity to reflect, dialogue, and pray together. I hope you will join us for this important work (more information about this can be found on page 4).

Further, this edition of News & Notes reports on Call To Action’s participation in efforts to ensure the perspectives and experiences of everyday Catholics are included in preparation for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family in October 2014.

Finally, News & Notes offers a spot light on Call To Action’s new and engaging website that encourages us to connect, learn, act, and pray. Important website features include:

- Instantaneous information on local, regional, and national JustChurch action campaigns
- Inspiring Catholic profiles demonstrating how individuals like you are initiating positive change
- Chapter news including regional contacts and location programming
- Media center posts that conveniently highlights Call To Action’s press statements and media appearances
- Spirituality resources that remind us that our church justice work is traditional work done by those we now call Saints.

Given Call To Action’s new online presence, its expanding programmatic initiatives, and activists like Adam joining the movement, 2014 is ripe for bold action for justice!

I’m grateful for all you do to cultivate a better church. Many blessings to you and your family in this new year.

Sincerely,

Jim FitzGerald
Executive Director

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Letter from the development director

Let Us Cultivate Together

As the new year begins, I wish to express how impressed and inspired I am by what this organization does and how folks — from every walk of life — give to and support its mission. From my very first encounter with this community at the 2013 Call To Action conference to the many emails, phone calls, conversations and notes of support, I’ve been so warmly welcomed. Thank you for the wonderful greeting!

I look forward to getting to know even more of our members, supporters, partners and allies in 2014. I am excited to visit a few major cities; I want to meet as many folks as I can in their communities so that I can learn more about the vibrant families who make up this organization and the incredible ways they are cultivating a better church in their area. This, we know, is at the heart of our work together.

Finally, as I continue to learn more about Call To Action, know that I want to hear from you and what matters most in your lives. Let us envision new ideas and possibilities together. Let us explore new ways to cultivate better church.

May you experience many blessings in 2014. Don’t hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or ideas about our work together.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Johnson
Director of Development
bonnie@cta-usa.org
Catholics make their voices heard with Vatican survey effort

Thank you! The outpouring of response to the Survey was truly inspiring. We know that Catholics have been speaking up to create a better Church for centuries, but the lack of response can sometimes be discouraging. We were inspired by the many who told us that the invitation to speak out gave them hope, even if they’d struggled with their Catholic identity.

Catholics around the world were eager to offer their help when they found out in October that Bishops were being instructed to consult the laity on “pastoral challenges to the family in the context of evangelization” for the upcoming Synod. Call To Action and other lay-led groups quickly launched an online version of the survey and responses poured in. Over 6,000 individuals responded in the first week alone, and the number grew to over 16,500 by the end of the month long effort.

Many of you were among those who took time to thoughtfully answer the many open ended questions about the needs, gifts and experiences of Catholics. These written answers will be taken into account in a scholarly report of effort, and will also be sent in full to the Synod leadership (with names and identifying demographics removed).

We stopped collecting responses to the online survey in time to send reports to the Bishops by their December and February deadlines, but the conversations and hope that the effort sparked are only just beginning. We’ve heard from local groups using the document to shape discussions in study groups and faith sharing communities; nationallly, we will be hosting an online discussion series which focuses on the question of how we minister to families in our own communities.

Catholics have enthusiastically embraced Pope Francis’ new focus on consultation and dialogue precisely because it has been the focus of the laity for so long; we are encouraged by this invitation and will continue to make our voices heard in this work to create a more just church.

An Encounter that redefines ministry

Continued from page 1

energies. And Sr. Miriam Therese Winter reminded us that the Divine Spirit is within us, and we must let that sacred energy of love and compassion spiral outward. Those spirals touch a whole lot of different kinds of people.

This is our call as the baptized, the beloved of God—to attend to the cries of those in need, whatever that need may be, no matter how different or unlikable or challenging the people crying out may be. Jesus’ response to Zacchaeus is breathtaking—he doesn’t comment on Zacchaeus’ job or his proclamation about making restitution. He emphasizes their commonality: “You too are a child of Sarah and Abraham.” Their basic humanity and connection is enough to give Zacchaeus a claim on Jesus. And that is all anyone needs to present to us in order for us to be called to minister.

The second challenge I saw in this Gospel was that there needs to be a figure or a place that is inspirational enough to cause people with profound needs to believe they can find help. Zacchaeus wouldn’t have humiliated himself if he didn’t have real hope that Jesus would provide what he lacked. On a recent videoconference discussing their experiences, our World Youth Day pilgrims told about people who so fervently desired to be part of the Papal Mass on the crowded beach in Rio de Janeiro that they waited in the Atlantic Ocean for hours, and then participated in the liturgy from the waves. Isn’t that a great current parallel to Zacchaeus’ scrambling up his sycamore tree for even a momentary glimpse of Jesus? How often, as Catholics, do we find people putting faith in our Church to such a degree?

The reality is that, rather than drawing people to it because of the healing, care, and nourishment it offers, our Church— we—are too often sending people away empty. Or worse than empty—damaged. This is happening in astonishing and tragic numbers. We all know it, we’ve experienced it in our families and among our friends, perhaps ourselves have only the most tenuous of relationships with the Church as it is typically conceived.

Once again, this weekend is a source of redirection and confrontation. Living our Baptismal call as Catholics means that our Church must be the light that beckons those in darkness, the balm that heals those who are broken, and the food that satisfies everyone who is hungry. And if we are the Church, as we so often say we are, and as we truly are, it is our duty and responsibility to make this reality come to pass. Can we do that in a Church where fear restricts authentic ministry? I don’t think that we can.

So living our Baptismal call in our day, in our Church may well mean transforming the very notion of Catholicism, freeing it from the structures and features that currently define it in our own minds and in popular conception. The structures that used to provide shelter now imprison us and create barriers between people, deafening us too often to the cries our hearts would so freely answer. The things that once lifted people out of misery now try to keep too many of us in a place that someone has deemed “appropriate,” but a place that we know in our hearts is not the home we deserve. If we are to live our Baptismal call, and truly be the Body of Christ in the world, we must remember that the crowds will grumble, and the powers that be will be threatened, and there may be heavy prices to be paid. But our sacred duty to the other beloved children of God is what must direct our actions.

Zacchaeus is no longer just a short, rich man desperate enough to climb a tree for a fleeting encounter with Jesus. Today, he represents our call to refocus our sense of ministry, of Church, of Baptism, of community so that they are defined not by a set of doctrines or even a sacramental system, but by the degree to which we see and respond to those most in need. That is a Church built of love, and a Church that will draw people to it, people of all ages, identities and beliefs, a Church where the only label that matters is beloved Child of God.

Who filled out the Synod on the Family Survey cosponsored by Call To Action?

- Lay (13,045) 88%
- Priest (502) 4%
- Deacon (146) 1%
- Professed religious (1,087) 7%

Webinar Series:
Ministering to all God’s families

As the Bishops and the rest of the church prepare for the Synod on the Family October 5-19, 2014, Call To Action will host several webinars (online meetings) to explore the joys and challenges facing diverse families in today’s modern world.

- What pastoral issues are facing today’s families?
- How can we better minister to the diverse needs of our communities?
- How might we extend the healing ministry of the church to those who need it?

Join the conversation and help bring people together to create a more welcoming community!

Each webinar session will be accompanied by a reflection guide that will encourage us to think creatively about improving our ministry to diverse families. These guides could be used by parishes, small faith-sharing groups, or simply over dinner to spark conversation and begin some deep thinking around our church and these topics. We then invite individuals and groups to join us for the webinar to interact with Catholics all over the world in sharing experiences and learning from each other.

Each webinar session will include a knowledgeable facilitator and online moderator. Information on how to access the webinar (virtual meeting room) will be emailed to those who have registered several days in advance of the session.

If you have questions about this series or would like to assist with this project, please email Ellen Euclide, Director of Programs, at ellen@cta-usa.org or by calling 773.404.0004 x261.

Resource Spotlight
Radical Grace

Fill your living room with Radical Grace!

CTA has partnered with the forthcoming documentary film Radical Grace (formerly SISTER) to spread the church renewal spirit. The film tells the story of sisters Jean Hughes, Chris Schenk and Simone Campbell as they stand up for their spiritual convictions in the face of the Vatican’s censure.

The producers are opening their filmmaking process up to the Call To Action community. This February and March Radical Grace invites you to screen the film’s work-in-progress in your home, church, or community center. The film team will provide a discussion guide and feedback questionnaire. When possible, the filmmakers will attend your gathering in person or by speakerphone.

To learn more, contact Rebecca Parrish at 312-324-0140 or rebecca@radicalgrace.com

Call To Action In the News

- NPR: U.S. Catholics Invigorated By Pope Francis' First Year December 26, 2013
- CNN: Commentary On Pope Francis As Time's Person-Of-The-Year Honor December 16, 2013
- Chicago Tribune: Vatican Survey Raises Hopes Among Catholic Faithful November 24, 2013
- ABC Newschannel 20: Fellow Catholics Protest Bishop's Same-Sex Marriage “Exorcism” November 20, 2013
- Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Catholics Asked To Assess Church’s Response To Social Issues November 18, 2013

For complete coverage visit www.cta-usa.org/media-center
20/30 Program Welcomes New Leaders

Caroline, Lui, Megan and Kristen all came to CTA in different ways, are all excited to join the 20/30 Leadership Team this year and we are blessed to have them! CTA’s 20/30 Team is a group of elected leaders who help create and coordinate programming for young adults and are helping CTA grow a welcoming community for young progressive Catholics.

“Being connected to and involved with the CTA community energizes me as we join together to shape a church and a world that are more inclusive, compassionate, simple, and, ultimately, radically loving and welcoming” said Kristen, who lives in Chicago.

This year’s team includes some who found us online, others when a friend brought them to conference, and still others who are involved in local CTA activities. Lui attended his first conference this year after having been involved with CTA Michigan and hopes to help strengthen ties between CTA 20/30 and local chapters like his.

Caroline, Lui, Megan and Kristen join team veterans Monica, Jennifer, Delfin, Carah, Krisssie and Emily to make up the 2014 Team. You can find out more about them and our 20/30 programming on our website and by following our young adult blog. We’re looking forward to a great year!

For more information about the 20/30 program visit www.cta-usa.org/cta2030

Megan

Inspiring Catholic: Caryl Callsen

I am an active retiree who loves spending time with my husband hiking, skiing, canoeing and camping—whatever we can do together! Our children and grandchildren also give me much pleasure. In my spare time, I like to volunteer for organizations which support just, humane, and compassionate causes.

What I love about the Catholic Church is the Mass; I can be with any group in any place that celebrates the mass and the basic format will be familiar. I especially like to share Eucharist with a small community of friends. The Catholic Church is filled with people and organizations that give much to social justice causes—I also love that!

I got involved with the church justice movement because I was greatly disturbed by what I encountered in many parishes and dioceses. The emphasis was not on compassion and acceptance of all, too many of the clergy and laity were concerned with appearances and finances. Discrimination and injustice was prevalent. Jesus’ message was forgotten.

One thing I do to create a better church is help put together spiritual, theological and social justice programs for the local Call To Action chapter in Sacramento. I’m a board member of that chapter and we offer monthly events that feature speakers, movies, and spiritual presentations that reflect the mission and goals of Call To Action. Attendees are introduced to ideas and theology that they would never experience in many parishes. They then become richer participants and, possibly, justice activists in the parish.

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JustChurch updates

Did you know Call To Action keeps a blogroll listing of all the church justice updates on our website? Read all the JustChurch updates online at: www.cta-usa.org/justchurch-updates

Save the Date for the 2014 Call To Action Conference!

BE...

- In community with the largest gathering of progressive Catholics in the country
- Inspired, motivated, and challenged by the speakers, presentations, and workshops
- Excited to work for change through networking, consultation, dialogue, and consensus
- Ready to gain new skills and practical tools for transformation

November 7-9, 2014

Now Accepting Program Proposals

Share your passion and expertise with the church justice movement! Consider presenting at the 2014 Call To Action conference.

To submit a proposal, please review the proposal guidelines online and fill out and submit the online proposal form at www.cta-usa.org/conference2014.

For any proposal to be fully considered, a completed program proposal must be submitted by March 15, 2014.
Looking to connect with Catholics in your area? Check out our chapters at www.cta-usa.org/chapters

Calendar of upcoming events

**Sunday, January 26  3pm – 5pm**

**“Is Your Parish Closing?” talk by Kate Kuenstler**

Washington Square Park, 20 Washington Square North, **Manhattan, NY**

Contact: Margaret Meehan, magorm513@gmail.com, 212-539-0974

Sr. Kate Kuenstler, a Canon lawyer, will discuss the process through which many dioceses in the United States have merged churches resulting in church closings. Sr. Christine Schenk, recently retired executive director of Future Church, will also speak.

**Sunday, February 2  1pm – 4pm**

**Rev. Robert Nugent Memorial Mass and Reception**

Whitefriars Hall, 1600 Webster Street Northeast, Washington, DC

RSVP by Wednesday, January 29th to 301-277-5674 or email at info@newwaysministry.org

**Saturday, February 8**

7:30pm – 8:30pm

**Guerrilla Communion in New York**

St Joseph High School, 80 Willoughby Street, **Brooklyn, NY**, United States

Contact: Margaret Johnson, margaret.johnson@hotmail.com, 202 365 6875

A potluck for progressive Catholics and allies. All are welcome in this place.

**Saturday, February 22**

9:30am – 4:00pm

**Matthew Fox: A Spirituality for the 21st Century**

St Andrew United Church Christ, 6908 Beneva Rd, **Sarasota, FL**, United States (map)

Contact: Imogene Rigidon, Branch Leader, SWFL--Peace River Branch, dr.imorigdon@gmail.com, 931 486-1456

Religions have too often promoted an exclusivism. Matthew Fox will explore how creation spirituality can help us move to hope by awakening us to our divine origins.

To view complete event details and submit items visit the Call To Action calendar online at: www.cta-usa.org/calendar

**Saturday, Feb 22  10am Central; 11 am Eastern; 9 am Mountain; 8am Pacific**

**Conference call with all chapter leaders**

A one-hour call among chapter leaders and CTA-USA staff liaison. Updates, discussions and logistics.

For more information contact Bob Heineman at HeinemanCTA@cta-usa.org

**Saturday, February 22  3pm – 5pm**

**CTA NW-Oregon chapter meeting.**

4th Saturday of each month from 3:00-5:00 at Central Lutheran Church in **NE Portland**

Contact: Al Nissila, 503-460-3455, ctaportor@prodigy.net, www.cta-nw-oregon.com

**Saturday, March 29  10am Central; 11 am Eastern; 9 am Mountain; 8am Pacific**

**Conference call with all chapter leaders**

A one-hour call among chapter leaders and CTA-USA staff liaison. Updates, issue discussions and logistics.

For more information contact Bob Heineman at HeinemanCTA@cta-usa.org

**Saturday, April 26, 3pm – 5pm**

**CTA NW-Oregon Chapter Meeting**

4th Saturday of each month from 3:00-5:00 at Central Lutheran Church in **NE Portland**

Contact: Al Nissila, 503-460-3455, ctaportor@prodigy.net, www.cta-nw-oregon.com

**Saturday, May 2–4, 2014**

**Call To Action West Coast Conference**

Sacramento, CA, Double Tree Hotel

Empowering the People of God: A Prophetic Call to Justice. Speakers include: Jamie Manson, Matthew Fox, Simone Campbell, Brian Swimme, Edwina Gateley, Ched Myers and more.

Contact: Caryl Callsen, Sacramento CTA, 209-295-2151, graycall@volcano.net.

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Save the Date

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November 7-9, 2014 | Memphis, TN
For more information visit www.cta-usa.org/conference2014