

“...today, I must stay at your house.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, Starr Daily was sentenced to prison for the 3rd time in his life. The judge said to him:

“More punishment is not what you need, BUT... I don’t know what else to do in your case. Our helplessness is your ...hopelessness.”

During Daily’s 3rd stay in prison, his behavior got so bad that he ended up in solitary confinement, in what they called... ‘the hole.’ Usually, a prisoner lasts two weeks there. After that, a doctor comes, checks him, and orders him removed to a regular cell.

BUT the usual two weeks came and went for Daily.

Then, one day, something remarkable happened. As Daily lay on the ice-cold floor of ‘the hole,’ a strange thought crossed his mind:

“I have always been a dynamo of power and energy. I wonder what would have happened to me... had I used my power and energy to do good...rather than do evil.”

This thought completely boggled his mind. For a long time, he just lay there, thinking about it. What happened next is best described in Starr’s own words:

“I began to dream ...disconnected dreams ...about ...Jesus. He is the one person I had tried to block out of my life for so long. Jesus seemed to pause at my side, as he did beneath Zacchaeus in the Sycamore tree. He looked into my eyes ...as if he were trying to enter my soul. In all my lousy life, I never felt so ...much ...love. Somehow, some-way, I opened up and let him in. Then, all the people I had hurt in my life seemed to parade across my mind. And, as they did, from what seemed out of nowhere, I poured out love on them. It seemed to heal their hurts!”

*That ‘**prison-floor-experience**’ changed Daily completely. Before the experience, he was a hardened criminal, filled with hate. After the experience, he was a new man, filled with love.*

Eventually, Starr Daily was released from prison. He began a career ...speaking and writing to promote prison reform.

Commenting on Daily’s remarkable conversion, Peter Marshall, the famous chaplain of Congress, said:

“Starr Daily is the best living proof I’ve ever seen that ‘a new creation in Jesus Christ’ is not just the old man, patched up... BUT an altogether, new-man.”

The story of Starr Daily bears a striking resemblance to the story of Zacchaeus in today’s Gospel. Both men were living bad lives. Both men encountered Jesus. Both men were remarkably transformed by that encounter. Both men made reparations for their past.

In a prayerful way, Daily poured out love on those he had hurt. Then, he devoted the rest of his life to prison reform.

Zacchaeus gave half of his belongings to the poor. To those he had cheated, he gave-back 4-fold. Now, how do the stories of Daily and Zacchaeus apply to our own lives, you ask.

Well, you know, I am glad you asked that question!

You see, both stories remind us of something we tend to forget:

*Jesus wants to enter our lives ever, more-deeply, and to help us to ‘grow’ in him,
just as he did and changed both Daily and Zacchaeus.*

BUT—*free will is a very ...real and important thing. Unlike the other animals, which live on instinct alone, we have to think and make choices in life ...free choices ...for which we will be held accountable.*

Regardless, the bottom line is this:

**Even though Jesus wants to enter our lives ever, more-deeply...
Jesus will NOT force himself upon us.**

Just as he did NOT force himself upon Daily or Zacchaeus ...he leaves us free, also!

Now, my final point. ‘When can we be certain Jesus is really walking by in our lives?’ you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that 2nd question!

Though there are several times when Jesus walks by in our lives, consider just these three:

1st, *Jesus becomes present in our lives, in a special way, each time the Scriptures are read and explained—in the Liturgy of the Word at Mass. Jesus told his disciples:*

“Whoever listens to you, listens to me.”

2nd, *Jesus becomes present in our lives, in a special way, in the Liturgy of the Eucharist at Mass.*

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood ...remains in me and I in them” Jn. 6:56

3rd, *Jesus becomes present, in a special way, whenever we encounter needy people. Jesus said:*

“Whoever helps one of these least of mine ...helps me.”

So-o—there are many times that Jesus becomes present in our lives, 3 times being:

- when the **word** of the Lord is broken and read to us,
- when the **body** of the Lord is broken and given to us, and
- when a **member** of the family **is broken** and comes to us for help.

When Jesus does become present to us...

we need only do what Daily and Zacchaeus did...

open our heart to Jesus and... invite him into our life; let him in.

If we do this, he will enter our lives as never before, strengthen & heal us,

just as he did for... Starr Daily, Zacchaeus,

and so many others of us over the centuries.

I now close with these beautiful words from the Book of Revelation:

**“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.
If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
I will enter his house and ...dine... with... him.”** Rev.3:20

*May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*