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Climbing to see Jesus

Jocelyn A. Sideco | Oct. 31, 2013 Young Voices

My second-grade teacher picked me to play Zaccheus. It was the first time I distinctly remember participating in Mass.

The Communion rail separated me from the priest and the altar servers, and only especially good readers were allowed to enter the sanctuary as they made their way up to the ambo.

I was scared I would fall or embarrass myself -- or worse, my teachers and my family.

We practiced in the classroom several times. Most of my classmates pretended to be people in the crowd that kept me from seeing Jesus. A few of my classmates played the role of the tree. The choreography required balance, agility and a lightness that didn't just come from my "short stature."

Our teacher took our class to the church one day to practice on the other side of the Communion rail. I remember the surge of confidence and certainty that pumped through my veins as we ran through the scene once. In this huge, empty, cold church, I felt called, affirmed and invited to choose life, love and hope.

I think I've been climbing to see ever since.

Now, with a much-needed injection of openness and hope, Pope Francis brings a human tenderness to his role similar to the tender intimacy Jesus brought into the lives of those he touched.

I'm not the only one climbing to see what Jesus is up to. Every day, I am enlivened by the real-time, real-life conversation about the church. Pope Francis has invigorated a seemingly cold, stubborn church by reminding us to be human, peaceful, loving people and community so that we are true to ourselves and our God. There's a renewed buzz as people are enamored by Pope Francis: Atheists have something to say; we are in better dialogue with our Jewish sisters and brothers; conservative and liberals alike are interested to hear what Pope Francis will talk about.

My favorite, by far, has been the latest reporting of a young boy [1] who just wouldn't leave the pope alone during a celebration of families over the weekend. This kid walked right up to the pope and wouldn't leave him alone. The child was persistent, helpful and loving. And the best part was that Pope Francis was all of that and more, as well! Pope Francis was persistent and constant for the child. He was also generous and helpful and placed the child on his own chair.

What a great real-time moment to contemplate. The pope, as head of the Roman Catholic church, looks lovingly, kindly and amusingly toward this young child and is similarly kind, playful and in relationship even when some Vatican officials around him try to "handle the problem."

I am moved by the skillful and genuine reality of presence that Pope Francis brings to each moment of critical concern. He reminds us to remain tender, loving, faithful and, most of all, present to one another as God is ever-

present in our lives.

As in Sunday's Gospel passage, Zaccheus, the tax collector, just wants to see, and because of this desire, wants to change his ways and live freely according to his well-formed conscience. Jesus' friendship not only summons him but insists on dining with him in his home.

We, too, have a deep desire within us. This curiosity can be satisfied by the joy in being hospitable people. When we are eager to see and open to share, we become fun and playful companions along the journey of faith in an extremely real and in-the-moment kind of way.

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