

## Trinity University 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

✠ Wilton Cardinal Gregory,  
*Archbishop of Washington*

The gospel story of Zacchaeus is one of my favorite ones because Zacchaeus is determined to encounter Jesus — his physical height was no obstacle. But equally determined was Jesus to encounter — so much so that the Lord invited himself to dinner at his home. The two characters wanted to engage one another and they would not be denied. Their story was no chance encounter but one destined according to God's plan.

Trinity University has a similar story of determination, although height was not the barrier they faced. It was

gender at the time of your establishment. Women were not admitted to most universities — including the newly established US Bishops' Catholic University of America a short distance away from this campus. Today, we rejoice that with Zacchaeus like determination, the sisters would not be denied the opportunity to offer higher educational opportunities to women of the time.

Zacchaeus was so thrilled to welcome Jesus into his house and into his life that he was converted from his former ways of treating his neighbors and conducting his business affairs. A sinner became a saint — at least the gospel suggests that there was a radical change in

this person's future behavior. He was not intimidated by the heckling of his neighbors. Encountering the Lord Jesus can have that kind of impact on any person who honestly seeks and finds Him.

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were courageous in establishing a university for women at a moment in time when such an undertaking was a revolutionary project. Why women could not even vote at the time. Why would they even need a college education? Like Zacchaeus, the Sisters ignored the naysayers of their day.

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur established an institution of higher learning for women at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that has today become a welcoming academic home for women of color and many who attend with limited financial resources. Who could have imagined that Zacchaeus would change so drastically because of his meeting Jesus? Who might have imagined that Trinity could claim so many prominent alumnae today?

A little man became a generous and just person. Intrepid women religious dared to venture into the lives of countless young women and invited them into a successful future through education. I dare say that

those sisters must have listened to this gospel passage any number of times and while they might not have associated their undertaking with Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus, the results were similar in achieving such an unexpected accomplishment. Perhaps because those sisters and their successors in this enterprise have also met Jesus as well! For 125 years, this university has served students – a few fortunate men included with startling accomplishments. Who might have guessed that would become the case back in 1897! Amen.