

# Zacchaeus Sunday 2012

## Today's Reading: Luke 19:1-10

*At that time, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."*

## Thoughts on the Gospel

In a regular Gospel reading, we expect to find Jesus Christ teaching through parables or healing the sick of physical and spiritual illnesses. Today, however, things are a bit different. We find Jesus walking through the city of Jericho and meeting a man named Zacchaeus. We find him changing a life with His words and love – a love that is frequently shown to the marginalized and hated in society.

In Hebrew, the name *Zacchaeus* means "clean or pure" (usually Biblical names tell us a bit about the person). However, Zacchaeus didn't have a "clean" or "pure" past. He was a chief tax collector and, as such, was a person that was hated by his fellow countrymen and seen as a "sell-out" because he collected their taxes during a time of Roman occupation.

Although he was reviled by so many, he wasn't hated by God. When we put "hate" and "God" in the same sentence, we need to remember that the Lord does not hate people; rather, He hates *the sins that we do* and wants us to repent (or, 'change our mind'). This is what happened today for Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus towered over people when it came to his job (he had authority over so many people during his time); yet, he couldn't see Jesus in the crowds because he was "short of stature". We don't know why, because the author of the Gospel doesn't tell us, but we know that Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus ([\*FYI: the tree still exists today in Jericho\*](#)). It was something that he just needed to do. He had probably heard about Jesus and His teachings, so Zacchaeus wanted to see Who this Man was.

Without having met him before, Jesus stops in front of the sycamore tree and says, "**Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house today.**" This surprised so many people: Jesus, Holiness Personified, is going to the house of a sinner! So, "they all murmured" (as St. Luke says) and started to gossip. They started to judge.

At the end of the Gospel, we see Zacchaeus promised he would give half his goods to the poor and restore four times the money he had stolen. Jesus then says "today salvation has come to this house...for the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."

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Now, some will say there was no “great miracle”, such as a blind man seeing or a resurrection. However, a miracle did occur indeed: a person who was away from God’s embrace now repented and was forgiven. This man was “lost” spiritually, having lost his way to the Kingdom of God as he pursued worldly glory and riches. When he saw Jesus, he found the “pearl of great price” and became truly rich. According to Church history, we know that Zacchaeus was very close to the Apostle Peter, became the Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, and is a Saint of the Orthodox Church.

In our lives, we face the temptation to be as lost as Zacchaeus was. It could be the stress of work and school, the false promises of the stock market, gambling and a list of other things that might keep us away from God. Zacchaeus was one of those people – but he decided to make a change in his life. He was seeking the Kingdom of God and he found it when he climbed that sycamore tree and found Christ. What is our sycamore tree? It is the Orthodox Church – there for us as we journey to Paradise with the Lord. Now, there will be people who will revile us and hate us for our faith and for the people we are. Forgiveness is a wonderful gift from God and Zacchaeus no doubt forgave those who judged him. Every Saint is a sinner who repents – and that is why we, too, can become holy by grace, Saints of the everlasting Kingdom of God. The question is: will we climb the sycamore tree and accept Jesus’ call to us?

Zacchaeus lived up to his name, becoming “clean” and “pure” with the forgiveness of Christ. Jesus is willing to forgive us our trespasses – as long as we ask from our hearts and “forgive those who trespass against us”. Let us refrain from judging our neighbour and become people who will embrace everyone, for we are all children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, asking for the same forgiveness from the Righteous Judge and «ο μόνος Φιλάνθρωπος», the true Lover of humanity.

## Discussion Questions:

### **For Children**

1. Every name has its roots and meaning. Find out how Zacchaeus lived up to his name during and after his meeting with Christ.
2. Why do you think Jesus was willing to go to the “house of a sinner”?
3. After hearing the reading, what would you ask: (a) Zacchaeus? (b) Jesus? (c) those who were there to witness the events?

### **For Youth/Young Adults**

1. Zacchaeus’ “limitations” did not stop him from meeting Jesus. What “spiritual limitations” do we have when encountering the Lord? How can we surpass them?
2. Tax collectors (like Zacchaeus) were hated by their fellow citizens, even considered traitors. Do you think it was fair for all tax collectors to be judged in this way? Do we find this in today’s society?
3. “A Saint is not born, they *become*”: Discuss.
4. What do you believe are the reasons for Zacchaeus accepting Jesus and His message?