

Meditations: Tuesday of the Thirty-Third Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the thirty-third week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: God enters the Zacchaeus' heart; learning from his "holy shamelessness;" conversion is shown through generosity.

- God enters the Zacchaeus' heart
- Learning from his "holy shamelessness"
- Conversion is shown through generosity

THE GOSPEL presents Jesus and Zacchaeus' encounter almost casually. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in Jericho, an important city near the Jordan River, and he was very wealthy. He collected taxes for the Roman authorities, which made him a public sinner; tax collectors often took advantage of their position to enrich themselves through extortion, earning their neighbors' scorn.

On this particular day, Jesus entered Jericho and walked through the city, accompanied by a large crowd (cf. *Lk 19:1-10*). Zacchaeus' desire to see the Master led him to a unique and somewhat ridiculous gesture, given his high social standing. Being short, *he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way* (*Lk 19:4*). Zacchaeus' action may seem to be driven by

mere curiosity, but his impulse was already a fruit of God's mercy, drawing him in and beginning to transform his heart. Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus into his home, but the Lord had welcomed Zacchaeus long before. "At times, God's meetings with man do appear to be merely fortuitous. But nothing that God does happens by chance."^[1]

When Jesus came to the spot, he looked up and said, 'Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house' (Lk 19:5). Christ's powerful gaze penetrated the publican's soul, and Zacchaeus heard Jesus' warm and affectionate voice call him by name. It is no wonder that *he came down quickly and received him with joy (Lk 19:6)*. Zacchaeus generously opened the doors of his house and his heart to meet the Savior.

ZACCHAEUS PROBABLY felt some inner resistance before climbing the tree. Certainly, he wanted to see Jesus, but he risked provoking even more hostility among his neighbors. From the outset, he had to overcome the shame of appearing ridiculous and disregard what others might think. He took a risk and overcame these obstacles "because the attraction of Jesus was stronger."^[2]

Saint Josemaría called Zacchaeus' boldness "holy shamelessness" and reflected on it thus: "Children taunt him and some adults laugh outright. But what does it matter? When it's a question of serving Christ, what do peoples' opinions and human respects matter? When a false sense of shame threatens to take hold of us, may our thought always be: Jesus and I, Jesus and I. [...] My Jesus, give me a holy shamelessness. [...] Grant me the integrity of steel, my God, so that I do what I should."^[3]

"What a good paymaster God is!" Saint Teresa of Avila exclaimed. "Do all you can, however little, for love of Him. He will reward you, for He will only look at the love which inspired your deeds."^[4] Although Zacchaeus' initial impulse may have had more to do with curiosity than with love, he "used all the means to meet Jesus, and he receives his reward. We too, if we want to experience Christ's burning look, need to give ourselves to Him [...]. Our reward comes in Jesus' look, in his call."^[5]

THE CHIEF tax collector welcomed Jesus into his home, and made room for God in his life. In just a few minutes, Jesus' presence began to transform his heart. Already, at the threshold of his house, he declared, *Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone*

of anything, I will repay them four times over (Lk 19:8). Jesus gently dispelled the darkness within him. Truly, "in his light the horizons of existence become broader: we begin to be aware of other people and their needs. [...] Opening ourselves to our fellow man, to our neighbor, constitutes one of the principal fruits of sincere conversion. Man breaks out of his selfish 'being for himself alone' and opens himself to others, feeling the need to 'be for others,' to be for his brothers and sisters."^[6]

"Since our hearts are small," Saint Catherine of Siena wrote, "we must do as Zacchaeus did: he was short in stature, and he climbed a tree to see God... We must do the same if we are short, if our heart is narrow and lacks charity: we must climb the tree of the holy cross, and there we will see and touch God."^[7]

Today, like He did at Jericho, Christ gazes upon us, calls us by name, and tells us: *I must stay at your house today* (Lk 19:5). His *today* is an invitation to generosity. Jesus' *today* resounds powerfully in us as a call to give ourselves sincerely to others.

"He can change us, he can transform our stoney hearts into hearts of flesh, he can free us from selfishness and make our lives a gift of love."^[8] Mary, who contemplated Jesus and lived with Him from the very beginning of his life on earth, will teach us how to invite Him into our own homes and let Him transform us into generous servants of others.

^[1] Saint John Paul II, Letter to Priests, 17-III-2002.

^[2] Pope Francis, Homily, 31-VII-2016.

^[3] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, 12-IV-1937.

^[4] Saint Teresa of Jesus, *Conceptions of the Love of God*, I, 6.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, 12-IV-1937.

^[6] Saint John Paul II, Homily, 8-VI-1999.

^[7] Saint Catherine of Siena, Letter 119.

^[8] Pope Francis, Angelus, 3-XI-2013.

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