

Meditations: Sunday of the Thirty-First Week of Ordinary Time (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 31st week of Ordinary Time.

- The eagerness to seek Jesus
- Seeing beyond the superficial
- A sincere conversion

ZACCHAEUS was a wealthy man who quite likely didn't enjoy a good

reputation among his fellow townsmen. He collected taxes owed to the Roman emperor, and therefore was seen as a traitor. Moreover, some tax collectors often took advantage of their position to extort more money from people through blackmail. But we read in the Gospel that, as soon as he learned that Jesus was passing through Jericho, he wanted to go and meet Him. Since he was not very tall, the crowd prevented him from seeing our Lord. So “he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for Jesus was to pass that way” (*Lk 19:4*).

Zacchaeus didn’t hesitate to do something that could make him look a bit ridiculous. Although he normally had to keep up appearances due to his position, his eagerness to see Jesus overcame the temptation to look good. He is willing to sacrifice even his own honor, and has no qualms about running ahead

to climb up a tree and peer through the branches. His concern to encounter Christ is more than mere curiosity. What Zacchaeus is seeking, more or less consciously, seems to be the truth of his own life. We can sense Zacchaeus's disappointment from realizing that riches don't satisfy one's deepest desires, and therefore he had a great eagerness to meet our Lord.

“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’” (*Lk 19:5*). Christ addresses by name someone who others looked down on. Greatly surprised, Zacchaeus “came down quickly and received him with joy” (*Lk 19:6*). Not only was his desire to see Jesus granted, but he also had the joy of welcoming Him into his own home. Perhaps we too, like Zacchaeus, have experienced that nothing can fill the

longing for meaning in our heart except God. And today we see how Jesus, in order to act, only needs to encounter a soul who is sincerely seeking Him: “Where is your desire for God? For that is what faith is: to have the desire to find God, to encounter him, to be with him, to be happy with him.”^[1]

JESUS’ WORDS caused a stir among the inhabitants of Jericho. “When they saw it they all murmured, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner’” (*Lk 19:7*). On other occasions, our Lord had already been criticized for mixing with people who were not known externally for being zealous keepers of the Law. Jesus’ attitude was prophesied by Ezekiel: “I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, I will bind up the crippled” (*Ezek 34:16*).

Pointing to how the Son of God himself acted, St. Josemaría encouraged his children to do whatever necessary to help each person they encounter: “Let us follow Christ’s example, and not reject anyone; to save a soul, we should be ready to go to the very gates of hell. No further, since beyond that one cannot love God.”^[2]

Our Lord’s gaze rises above social prejudices. He doesn’t focus on the mistaken deeds Zacchaeus may have committed, but rather sees all his beauty as a son and all the good he is capable of. “Sometimes we try to correct or convert a sinner by scolding him, by pointing out his mistakes and wrongful behavior. Jesus’ attitude towards Zacchaeus shows us another way: that of telling those who err how valuable they are, the value that God continues to see despite everything, despite all their mistakes.”^[3] Our Lord doesn’t focus

on a person's past mistakes but on the deepest desires of their heart, where He sees a wounded person in need of healing. People grow when they feel loved, when they know they are valuable, worthy of others' trust. This is how Christ acts with each of us. He doesn't dwell on our mistake, but heals and overcomes it with his love, and renews our desire to be close to Him.

THE GOOD that Jesus had glimpsed in Zacchaeus begins to manifest itself. Standing up, the host opens up his heart: "Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold" (*Lk 19:8*). Zacchaeus's goals in life have changed completely after his encounter with Christ. His priority is no longer to enrich himself at the

expense of others, but to help those most in need through his work.

“Caring for other people, for our neighbor, is one of the principal fruits of a sincere conversion. That person emerges from his selfishness, ceases to live for himself, and turns his eyes towards others.”^[4]

No one had ever asked Zacchaeus for such a great act of generosity. He doesn't feel obliged or coerced to do so; he simply decides to take the initiative. And his decision doesn't seem heroic to him, since he is amazed at our Lord's goodness and generosity, and knows that Jesus has loved him first. “I opt for God because I truly want to, freely, without compulsion of any kind. And I undertake to serve, to convert my whole life into a means of serving others, out of love for my Lord Jesus.”^[5]

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” (*Lk 19:9-10*). Our Lord’s generosity fills Zacchaeus’ heart in a way that riches never could.

Knowing that we are free to love “fills our heart with joy, and with it, good humor.”^[6] We ask Mary to help us discover the happiness that comes from living close to her Son, attentive to the needs of others.

^[1] Francis, Homily, 12 March 2018.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, 8 December 1941.

^[3] Francis, Angelus, 30 October 2016.

^[4] St. John Paul II, Homily, 8 June 1999.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 35.

^[6] Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 9 January 2018, no. 6.

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