

## SPIRITUALITY

### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 3:16

R<sup>1</sup>. Alleluia, alleluia.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.

R<sup>2</sup>. Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel Luke 19:1-10; L153C

At that time, Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town.

Now a man there named

Zacchaeus,

who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was;

but he could not see him because of the crowd,

for he was short in stature.

So he ran ahead and climbed a

sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way.

When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said,

“Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.”

And he came down quickly and received him with joy.

When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying,

“He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.”

But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,

“Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone

I shall repay it four times over.”

And Jesus said to him,

“Today salvation has come to this house

because this man too is a descendant of Abraham.

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.”

### Reflecting on the Gospel

Crowds are difficult places to be for many of us, especially those of short stature! Even at relatively tame events like a city parade, the hustle and bustle and bumps and jolts can be challenging, and that's before we see anything. With our example of a parade, sometimes parents will raise children up on their shoulders to give them a better glimpse. Zacchaeus seems to have had a similar idea when he decided to climb a sycamore tree to have a better view. Though a tax collector and a very wealthy man, Jesus chose to stay with him.

What follows develops a major Lukan theme: the right use of wealth. We recall the many other stories in Luke's gospel that touch on this theme as well: the Prodigal Son, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Dishonest Steward, to name a few. These were parables. The story of Zacchaeus is about Jesus and his interaction with the wealthy tax collector. Interestingly, he does not tell him to sell his possessions and give them all to the poor. That commandment is reserved for only one person, a lover of money whose sole love prevented him from following Jesus (Luke 18:18-23). No, Zacchaeus does not receive that command. He tells Jesus that he will give half of his possessions to the poor. Moreover, any extortion will be paid back four times over. With that, he is right with

the Lord. So the story is about the right use of wealth, in this case, up to half of his money for the poor, making amends for any unsavory activity in his business, and paying four times anything he might have extorted.

The question naturally comes to us, how do we use our wealth? How have we gained it? Are we willing to make amends if some of our resources were ill-gotten? Such amends are much more than merely paying a fine as a part of doing business. Zacchaeus offers up to four times the amount extorted if such a thing happened.

In the end, this “sinner,” for he is a tax collector, is willing to use his money rightly, and for that he has salvation. We too can examine how we use our money, resources, and wealth. Is it for the building up of other people or for our own self-hording or indulgence? Our own salvation may hang in the balance.

### Living the Paschal Mystery

The right use of money has been a perennial challenge for Christians and many others. We are not in the “rat race” to enrich ourselves but we undoubtedly want to provide for our families and give them the care and concern that leads to a healthy, productive life. Yet we hear injunctions to give to the poor, in one case to sell everything and give it to the poor! Luke's admonition in today's story is not that every Christian disciple sell everything and give it to the poor. That command was for one person, for whom wealth had become a true obstacle to following Jesus. Rather, each disciple is required to use wealth and money rightly. What that looks like will be as different as each person. But ultimately, we are not disciples of money. We are disciples of Christ. And nobody can serve two masters. Perhaps one question we might ask ourselves today is: Do we serve money, or does our money serve us? In Zacchaeus's case, his wealth served him. He was master over his wealth and was willing to give away a



substantial portion. What are we willing to give away to serve the Lord. Is there anything we serve rather than him?

**Focusing the Gospel**

**Key words and phrases:** Zacchaeus . . . was seeking to see who Jesus was.

**To the point:** In the gospel we hear that both Zacchaeus and Jesus share something in common. They are both “seekers.” In the beginning of this gospel passage we are told that Zacchaeus is “seeking to see who Jesus was” and at the end Jesus discloses that he is in fact the one who has “come to seek / and to save what was lost.” To seek requires effort and an ability to be open to what one might find. Jesus and Zacchaeus are both rewarded in their seeking. Their search ends with joy and communion.

**Connecting the Gospel**

**to the first reading:** When Jesus enters Jericho his plan is to “pass through the town.” Upon seeing Zacchaeus perched in the sycamore, however, this plan changes, and Jesus tells this man who is a wealthy, chief tax collector, “[C]ome down quickly, / for today I must stay at your house.” The crowd surrounding Jesus is surprised and dismayed. Why would this man who has profited from his collaboration with a foreign, oppressive government be rewarded with a personal invitation from Jesus? Who is this God who seeks the lost? The author of the book of Wisdom names him the “Ruler and Lover of souls.” This divine ruler and lover can “loathe nothing” he has made, and “overlook[s] sins for the sake of repentance” (NABRE).

**to experience:** As with the parable of the Prodigal Son we are left with the question, can we be happy at the repentance and forgiveness of a sinner? If not, we are not fit for the kingdom of God as revealed by our first reading and gospel today.

**Connecting the Responsorial Psalm**

**to the readings:** Psalm 145 is written as an acrostic, with each verse beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Its theme covers the “greatness and goodness of God.” How fitting, therefore, that it uses every letter available to praise that which is limitless and infinite. As first-century Jews, both Jesus and Zacchaeus would have grown up with the words of the psalms citing God’s grandeur and mercy. While the crowd surrounding Jesus is aghast at his decision to stay with such a well-known sinner, it makes sense when we remember that this is the Lord who is “gracious and merciful, / slow to anger and of great kindness,” who is “faithful in all his words, / and holy in all his works.”

**to psalmist preparation:** Sometimes it seems that we are at a loss for words when we think about God. This week, take some time to try and write your own acrostic of praise. Beginning with each letter of the alphabet write a statement about the God who has been with you even from your mother’s womb, the one who seeks the lost, and shows sinners the way.

**PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING**

The book of Wisdom names God the “Ruler and Lover of souls.” Other than Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, what name for God are you most drawn to at this point in your spiritual journey?

St. Paul tells the Thessalonians, “We always pray for you, / that our God may make you worthy of his calling / and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose / and every effort of faith.” How does your family and/or parish practice intercessory prayer?

In the gospel, Zacchaeus climbs a sycamore tree because he is “seeking to see . . . Jesus.” What helps you to see Jesus clearly?

How would you answer the question, Do I serve money or does my money serve me?