

‘Zacchaeus’: the name of a way to walk to Jesus

Zacchaeus is qualified in the gospel today with three terms: as ‘chief of tax collectors’, ‘rich’ and ‘short of stature’. Though Jewish, they, who collected taxes from the countrymen for the Romans who are their perpetual enemies, not only took advantage of their countrymen but also institutionalized corruption; therefore, everyone looked down at them, considered them as thieves, sinners and outcast. The pharisees never shared a meal with them. “Chief of TC” means *boss of corruption*. But Jesus alone was an exception: he not only shared meal with them, but even chose one, namely Matt. from among them to be one of the 12 apostles.

The common man, when faced with unresolvable problems in life, often may fail, and choose new ways. Even when the whole Jewish community hate Zacchaeus, calling him master of corruption, Jesus’ hope for Zach. did not die. That is the way of God: keeping always beautiful dreams about all sinners and keeping the door to conversion open till the day of death. He will find a saint in the sinner woman-Magdalene; a missionary in a Samaritan woman, an apostle-Paul- in a persecutor-Saul. He never loses hope about anyone. He is a God of second chances!

Gospel today tells us: how does God deals with people like an outcast? Within an ordinary framework of understanding, what do you expect Jesus to do? How dare you climb on a tree to look at me? I too condemn you, traitor of the community?

B&S, Zach. is hungry for God. All that he has accumulated has not given him peace of mind & happiness. Yes, even a sinner’s heart is longing for God. Jesus is seeking the soul of a sinner. He does everything in his power, to draw him in, to save him, to include him. Jesus looks up and see Zach. “Z, come down; today, I must stay in your house”. With that statement, the whole story changes! Zach. enters into the milieu of God’s love, so as to not but convert and change. Yes, *conversion is the experience of recognizing the true love of God*. The realization, that God’s love is much greater than all the wealth I have possessed.

What follows in Z. is an earnest desire to abandon all that is displeasing to God. "Half of my wealth to the poor; returning 4 times more those money gained by cheating". Here we see, that Christian *conversion* has a divine and human dimension. Z, who experience God through Jesus, converts into new attitudes towards others and wealth. The repentance and conversion become complete, only when you do reparation for your misdeeds and open your heart to the sorrow of the poor.

The story tells that love always comes first, from God. It is not because Z. repented that Jesus loved him; but because Jesus loved him that he became repentant. Even though it is Z. who ran ahead and climbed over the tree to see Jesus, truly it is Jesus who search for the lost Z. and found him. Friends, for any conversion, you require the grace of God and the human effort.

Now it's always the fact that we human beings are a lot less generous than God in this regard. Listen to the response of the people around Z: They started grumbling and said: He has gone to be the guest of a sinner. How quick and easy to pass judgement!

But Jesus covers him with appreciation: "Today, salvation has come to this house!" When Z. opens his heart to his brethren, Jesus addresses him "son of Abraham": why = bcs, Abraham who shuns unconditionally his wealth to his stubborn brother Loath! (Gen.13.8) Z. who was considered an outcast, becomes "son of Abraham." = means, Zacchaeus was not saved in isolation. His salvation would affect the entire community, since he would provide support for the poor and give back to those he had defrauded. His community would be transformed by the presence of an 'outcast' whom people could now trust.

There are more than 75 percent of people suffering from low self-worth. Zacchaeus serves as a good example of how to resist and survive the critical comments of others, and loss of self-worth. Salvation enters his heart, and his home. For, the son of Man came to search for the lost and to save them.