



# WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

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*"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10*

Our Gospel today shows another encounter between Jesus and a tax collector. As Jesus was passing through Jericho a man who climbed a sycamore tree caught his attention, *a man "trying to see who Jesus was."* Jesus was passing through on his way to Jerusalem where important events of His death and resurrection will occur. But Jesus' journey is not like the "non-stop zephyr" of our times, the diesel-powered train that blows past every village it approaches. He seeks outreach for His ministry at every opportunity. He travels with purpose.

Some apparent crisis in Zacchaeus' life caused him to rebuke his offenses. Perhaps it was Jesus' message that had been reverberating throughout Judea that convicted him of his sins. This conviction moved the heart of Zacchaeus with a desire to abandon his wickedness as he came to believe that this was the Son of Man, his Lord and lover of souls.

Zacchaeus was not just any tax collector. He was a chief tax collector and a wealthy man. He would have been known to be in the favor of the Roman leaders. In other words, he had a great deal to lose. Don't be misled because he was *"short in stature."* This is a reminder for us that we should not judge people by physical appearances only. This man used his creativity to overcome his diminutive size. For Zacchaeus, climbing the sycamore tree has a deeper symbolism. From the Prophet Amos we are told of the *"dresser of sycamore trees,"* a peasant whose livelihood was to climb sycamore trees to pierce the skin of the sycamore figs, hastening the ripening process. This trimmer, even in his poverty, hastens the ripening process to bring to completion God's plan for the tree. Likewise Zacchaeus, in humility, must empty himself of his wealth and take on the poverty of a peasant, so that he might hasten the "ripening" of the proclamation of Jesus' message to his village.

In the bible the sycamore tree symbolizes strength, protection, eternity, and divinity. In other words, the sycamore tree suggests a tree of regeneration and transformation, a tree for the true status and stature of a man seeking holiness and oneness with Jesus. Jesus, like Amos the prophet, is a passionate advocate of repentance and social justice.

Jesus is moved by Zacchaeus' desire to seek Him. Zacchaeus the sinner is calling out to Jesus, as if begging Him, *"have mercy on me, a sinner."* Hearing this, Jesus desires to dine at this sinner's house. Jesus wants to dwell within him, wants to configure the heart and mind of Zacchaeus into the heart and mind of Jesus. This is the divinization process of all who are baptized.

In the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus discovered his true purpose and calling in life. As we reflect on this passage, may we be enlightened to better understand our true purpose. May we be moved to put our pride aside as we ask Jesus to dine with us at the table of the Eucharist. May Jesus come to configure our hearts and minds in His image and likeness. May we empty ourselves to be filled with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and His merciful presence, carrying the light of Christ to those most in need of his mercy.

**A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to Luke**

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him,  
*“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”*

So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.  
All who saw it began to grumble and said,  
“He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,  
“Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor;  
and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”

Then Jesus said to him,  
*“Today salvation has come to this house,  
because he too is a son of Abraham.  
For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”*

***The Gospel of the Lord***

