

**The Thirty First Week in Ordinary Time**  
**October 30, 2016**

Today's Gospel finds Jesus coming closer and closer to Jerusalem where the purpose of his mission to the world would soon be fulfilled. He knew that he would have to give his life, and he knew that he would have to give it soon. In the face of this reality material possessions were of little use.

But then, material possessions were of little use to Jesus anyway. But as the events of his passion and death began to materialize, he urgently stressed to those who would follow him that they too should detach themselves from the things of this world.

And he tells us to do this by concentrating on the essentials, on the things that are really important.

To see that justice is done; to love the poor; to protect life, to forgive one another to lay down our lives for the sake of others.

Last week we heard Jesus telling us about the tax collector sitting in the back of the Temple and the self-congratulating Pharisee sitting up in the front. The Pharisee was busy justifying himself and claiming to be better than the tax collector who was huddled in the back of the Temple asking only for God's mercy.

Today we are told about another tax collector named Zacchaeus.

Notice that today's Gospel narrative isn't a parable; it's an account of what Jesus actually said and did with a real person.

By including this story in his gospel, Luke created a beautiful illustration showing how in the Kingdom everything is opposite to the way they are in the world.

For example, at first glance Zacchaeus was an unworthy man, he's a tax collector—a crooked one at that—and so he's understandably despised by all the people. He has compromised both his patriotic and religious principles and has collaborated with the Romans in order to have the privilege of skimming off a percentage of the taxes for himself.

But Zacchaeus knew this perfectly well; he knew his own sins better than anyone else. And he was also very curious about Jesus, so he climbed the tree in order to catch a glimpse of him.

Then Zacchaeus experienced a powerful moment of conversion when Jesus invited himself to his home. This unexpected request of Jesus had an overwhelming impact on him because this holy man of God, wanted to bless him with his presence. And it made Zacchaeus want to respond in the most extraordinary way by surrendering his stolen money and becoming a benefactor of the poor.

Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house!" The sequence of events is clear: a sinful man becomes curious, followed by an encounter with the Lord, followed by conversion, that was then followed by repentance, followed by a total change of life.

On the other hand the complainers watched all of this and they were envious; they weren't open to change because they had no sense of their own sinfulness.

They were too mean-spirited and too consumed by pride to give thanks to God for the remarkable transformation that had taken place in Zacchaeus.

From their point of view, Zacchaeus had benefited from his corrupt way of life and enjoyed great wealth and yet now received even more honor for giving it all away. They just didn't get it!

They didn't get it because they judging Zacchaeus and his situation rather than thinking of their own sinfulness and their own need for God's mercy. In short they acted as his judges; something that we know is reserved to God alone.

Like the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the crowds grumbled against Zacchaeus and against Jesus.

Obviously, they could see and hear what was happening, but they weren't willing to open themselves to the fact that it was for people like Zacchaeus that the mercy of God would be revealed in all its saving power.

Zacchaeus' experience, his humility, his honest assessment of himself and his willingness to literally go out on a limb to respond to God and to God's grace and mercy is an invitation and a challenge for each of us to allow Jesus to come into our hearts and homes.