



My Beloved Ones,

I write to you today, having embarked on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Know that I am praying for you at all times as we visit the places in which our Lord lived and taught, was crucified and rose again.

One such place is Jericho, where this Sunday's Gospel tells of our Lord's encounter with Zacchaeus, a tax collector. Now, as today, tax collectors were some of the most disliked individuals of the time—but during Christ's ministry, they were considered traitors to their country, given that they were Jews who extorted money from their fellow citizens in order to pay their occupying Roman masters.

Even so, Zacchaeus, like most of the citizens of Jericho, wished to see Jesus as he passed through. However the Gospel tells us that Zacchaeus *"could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature."* (Luke 19:2) Being a clever man, Zacchaeus decided to climb into a sycamore tree, to give himself a better view.

Jesus, knowing all things, stopped as he was passing by the tree, looked up, and said, *"Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today."* (Luke 19:6) Zacchaeus was naturally very happy to hear that Jesus wished to visit him, but the crowd was, of course scandalized, saying to one another, *"He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."* (Luke 19:7)

Though Zaccheus knew what his neighbors thought of him, he was so moved, he inspired to change his ways then and there, telling Jesus, *"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold."* (Luke 19:8) Zacchaeus obviously understood that his practice of extorting his fellows as a means of earning his own living was wrong, and there decides to begin the process of true and sincere repentance.

Christ, knowing the hearts of all who were present, demonstrates His purpose. The people of Jericho may have been scandalized at the behavior of this man they considered a prophet, but Christ was not like the Pharisees and rulers who separated themselves from those considered sinners. Christ came into this world in order to rejoin God and man, even extortionists like Zacchaeus.

Therefore our Lord says this to Zacchaeus to demonstrate the purpose of His salvific mission, now, and for all time. *"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."* (Luke 19:9-10)

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