

King James Version: Luke Chapter 19

- [1](#) And [Jesus](#) entered and passed through [Jericho](#).
- [2](#) And, behold, there was a man named [Zacchaeus](#), which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.
- [3](#) And he sought to see [Jesus](#) who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.
- [4](#) And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.
- [5](#) And when [Jesus](#) came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, [Zacchaeus](#), make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.
- [6](#) And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.
- [7](#) And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.
- [8](#) And [Zacchaeus](#) stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the [poor](#); and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.
- [9](#) And [Jesus](#) said unto him, This day is [salvation](#) come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of [Abraham](#).
- [10](#) For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Often when we see or know about a person who is, or is considered to be, evil, in our hearts we have feelings of strong enmity. We judge him, avoid all possible contact with him, and consider him to be an abomination to the world. We are convinced that this person will be condemned to hell and deservingly so. Such a person was Zacchaeus, about whom we read in this Sunday's Gospel. He was not just a publican (tax collector for the hated Romans). He was the chief of the publicans. He totally abused his power, extorting much more in tax collections than was required, pocketing the difference, amassing great wealth. Because of his great greed and arrogance, he had no mercy for widows or poverty-stricken people. The misery that he caused could not be measured. Surely such a person was undeserving of any love or compassion and people were completely justified in hating him.

But if we act in this manner, we are poor Christians, living according to the values of this vain world. We forget about our Savior's stern dictate to us to *love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you*. And our error is emphatically demonstrated to us by the way that the Savior treated this evil man, and what transpired afterwards. The Savior did not condemn or reject him. He treated him with compassion and gentleness. And this one small act of kindness so amazed and affected Zacchaeus, that it motivated and empowered him to completely change his way of life. This one small act of kindness turned an evil sinner into a repentant man and opened the door for him to the Kingdom of God.

What motivated Zacchaeus to seek out the Savior is not completely known. Some think that it was simple curiosity. Other Church fathers suggest that the publican had by this time become

disillusioned with his corrupt way of life, beginning to feel strong pangs of conscience which were condemning him for his evil deeds. While it is not clear what his motivation was, what is without doubt a fact is that if the Savior had reacted according to the values of this world, the heart of the publican would have only hardened all the more, depriving him of the possibility to change. What a powerful lesson to all of us to force ourselves to never condemn another person, no matter how evil we think that that person is. A person never loses the possibility to repent while he is still alive. Only death can close the door to sincere repentance. And sometimes a simple act of non-judgmental kindness is able to overcome a great measure of evil in a person. This is the first very important lesson that we can learn from this weeks' Gospel reading.

Another very important lesson is given to us by Zacchaeus through the way that he repented. Often, we think that all we need to do to repent is to say that we are sorry for what we had done. While this is a very important step, it is only the first step. In sinning, we do damage. Saying sorry will not always correct the damage. If we are sincere in our repentance, we try our best to correct the damage. For example, in a disagreement with a neighbor, you could lose control of yourself and throw a rock through his window. Asking him for forgiveness doesn't make his window whole. You still need to replace the broken glass to make the neighbor whole again. Zacchaeus damaged many people through his corruption. He mitigated the damage to his society by giving away half of his wealth to the poor. He restored the damage that he had done to individual people by repaying them four-fold.

In concluding my write-up, I just wanted to note that the Gospel reading for this Sunday also serves as a harbinger of what is quickly approaching in our spiritual life. This reading is the first reminder to us that Great Lent is soon coming. Next week, the Church begins to prepare us for the onset of Great Lent, the time when we are called to examine our internal selves, note what we are doing that is contrary to God's Law, and repent. May God give us strength to repent as sincerely and completely as we see Zacchaeus doing in Sunday's Gospel.

May God bless you with His infinite Love and Grace. I hope that all of you are able to come to the liturgy on Sunday. Since the super bowl game kick-off is only at 3:30, we have an opportunity to both honor our Lord on Sunday (which is commonly called the Lord's Day) and still be able to watch the game if we so desire.

With Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar