

# Reflection for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary time, Cycle C

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**1st Reading:** *Wisdom of Solomon 11:22–12:2*

**Intro:** This is from a book written about 50 years before Christ. It is not in the current Jewish canon but was obviously known by Jesus and St. Paul because of their teachings which seem to be related to it. The selection we have today is a reflection on God's mercy. The connection to today's Gospel may be the remark that God overlooks sins for the sake of potential repentance.

**2nd Reading:** *2 Thessalonians 1:11–2:2*

**Intro:** Today and for the next couple of weeks we have selections from the 2d Letter to the Thessalonians. The letter begins with a greeting, then a section of thanksgiving for the Church in Thessalonica, then a prayer for them, with which today's selection begins, and a warning to not believe false reports that the day of the Lord is at hand – evidently there had been such reports.

**Gospel:** *Luke 19:1–10*

**Summary:** [Type summary here]

This week's Gospel selection is an amazing story if for no other reason than it can be interpreted in two contrastingly different ways. Most times, I think, it is interpreted as a story of a sinner who, because of his encounter with the Lord, repents. It doesn't have to be interpreted that way, though. Let's look at the alternative.

The first sign that he may not be the sinner we, and the people of his day, think him to be is his name. The name Zacchaeus literally means "pure one" or "innocent one". Why would Luke tell the story of someone named Zacchaeus if he wanted us to think he was a sinner?

Of course, the Jewish people of Jesus' time thought all tax collectors were sinners. They worked for the Roman government who ruled them and they used Roman money which had the image of the emperor, who was considered a god, on it. This was considered by many to be a violation of the second Commandment. Also, there was the constant temptation for tax collectors to overcharge and keep the extra money for themselves. The Jewish people of Jesus' day didn't like tax collectors, they considered them sinners and, in many ways, excluded them from the community.

This Gospel story tells us that Zacchaeus was "seeking" to see who Jesus was. Zacchaeus must have heard about Jesus the wonder worker and wanted to see him. Why do we do that? Why do we have a desire to see famous people? I think it is because we have a desire to experience them in some way or another. Zacchaeus, to his joy, got more than he bargained for.

When the people grumble at Jesus for going to stay, overnight, at the house of a sinner, the Gospel tells us that Zacchaeus "took his stand". And, he said I "give" half of my possessions to the poor and if I extort anything from anyone, I "repay" it four times over.

Following Rev. Joseph A. Fitzmyer S.J., I'm giving the literal translation of the Greek here. Fitzmyer states that there is no need to understand this present tense as a future pledge. He says it is better to understand Zacchaeus as describing his customary practice. Maybe this story is not about a sinner who repents.

In response to Zacchaeus' statements, Jesus addresses the crowd. I know your translation probably says "Jesus said to him..." as if he was talking to Zacchaeus but the same Greek phrase could be translated "Jesus said about him.." This fits far better with the following two statements Jesus makes which are in the third person about Zacchaeus.

Jesus was telling the grumbling crowd that Zacchaeus is also a son of Abraham and should be treated as such. Jesus' second statement fits the beginning of the first "Today salvation has come to this house... For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost" Jesus is the salvation that has come and he seeks out those who were lost because of the attitudes of the leadership and many of the Jewish people of His time. Hebrew Scripture, on a couple of occasions, castigates the Jewish leadership for scattering the people and says that He, God himself, will gather them (See Ezk 34:11-16). Is this what Jesus is doing?

Understanding this story as Zacchaeus being righteous, just as the tax collector in the previous story (Lk 18:9-14) was declared righteous, this Gospel story invites us to reflect upon who we have pushed out of the community. Who have we caused to be lost because of our judgmental attitudes? Maybe it is not Zacchaeus who is the sinner. Maybe it is us!

## Reflection

When they all (the crowd) saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham.

Lk 19:7-9

### Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

### Alternative:

Reflect upon/share about your participation in the social, economic and political systems of our day and time. Who is judged unworthy and excluded in our system? What can you do to help include our brothers and sisters who suffer exclusion?

## Verse by Verse

Lk 19:2 Zacchaeus | The name Zacchaeus means pure or innocent one.

Lk 19:2 | The identification of Zacchaeus as a chief tax collector who was very rich sets us up to agree with the crowd about him being a sinful man. Tax collectors were considered sinful anyway because they worked for the Roman government, who subjugated the Jewish people, and handled Roman money which had the image of the emperor who was considered a god. The fact that he was wealthy strengthened the assumption that tax collectors cheated the people. Many believed this was in violation of the third Commandment which prohibits graven images.

Lk 19:3a "...was seeking to see who Jesus was." | Because of what follows, I take this to mean more than he was just curious and wanted to see Jesus. He was a seeker who wanted to see who Jesus was. It is like the disciples of John the Baptist who wanted to see where Jesus was staying.

Lk 19:3b "Short in stature" | Short in stature is just a physical description. The Greek does not have the possible English meaning of stature in the community.

Lk 19:4 "Sycamore tree" | Whatever tree Luke is describing is not related to the American Sycamore tree.

Lk 19:5 "For today I must stay at your home" | The "must" in this comment implies that Jesus considered it part of his mission. "Stay in your home" means to stay overnight. UBS Hndbk

Lk 19:8 "Zacchaeus stood there" | the Greek literally, "having taken his stand". UBS Hndbk Luke is the only evangelist who uses this phrase and is usually used when what follows is important to, if not definitive of, the speaker.

Lk 19:8 "I shall give... I shall repay" | is literally "I give... I restore". UBS Hndbk It is not a future statement although UBS Hndbk say it is best understood as a pledge; it doesn't say why that is best. Joseph Fitzmyer S.J., in AYBC, says that it signifies his customary actions and should not be taken as a pledge.

Lk 19:9a "Salvation has come to this house today". | Fitzmyer, in AYBC, says "The contrast of salvation coming to "this house" with the grumbling of the critical crowd is significant."

Lk 19:9b "For this man too, is a son of Abraham." | I take this, as does Fitzmyer, to be the real contrast. No matter what the rest of the Jews think, Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham.

Lk 19:10 "...to seek and to save what was lost" | The same Greek word is used for lost here as the one-of-one-hundred sheep which was lost and the shepherd went to find. Does this point back to Jeremiah 23:1-4 where it is the shepherds who have scattered the sheep?

Is this story connected to the story of the preceding story Pharisee and the Tax Collector wherein the humble tax collector is found righteous through his prayer?