

"Today I must stay at your house" - Luke 19: 1 . 9 (Worship the Lord 16/3/2014)

Holy and Almighty God, we join with all who trust in You through the saving grace of Jesus Christ to worship You in the magnificence of Your creation and in the beauty of Your Holiness. We thank You for the privilege to call on You as our Heavenly Father when we move within the sanctifying light of Christ, having received Him as our Lord and our Saviour. So speak to each one who hears this message, using Your timeless Word to let us hear anew from You, so that you may equip us for living in the fullness of Your kingdom on Earth and secure us with redeemed, eternal life. In Your Holy Name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we pray, Amen.

We have been asked to consider this morning the statement of Jesus, "I must stay at your house today." Let us hear our text from St. Luke 19, verses 1 to 10:

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. ²There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. ³He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

⁵When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."

⁶Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. ⁷But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

⁸Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

⁹Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man^[a] came to seek and save those who are lost." (NLT)

Thanks be to God for His holy Word.

What would be *your* reaction upon hearing Jesus say to you, "I must stay at your house today"?

Zacchaeus was joyful and never hesitated. I am sure we too would all be overcome with joy and terribly excited. Jesus has taken note of you, has honoured you by offering to come to your home; the first word He says to you is your name. *Your* name. Maybe that truth will penetrate your mind before you start panicking about the state of your house for receiving *any* guests; and in particular Jesus ó God, the *Holy One*! It's too late ó He knows my name, He knows what is in my house, or what is not there that you think you

should have on display for Him to see. You know the picture of you, the first impression, so to speak, You'd prefer Him to gain of you from what your house depicts as your way of living and the display of things that are obviously important to you. But you realise He knows already. *Yet He still wants to come.* Remember that. If you are worried that there is something in your home, or place of work, or anywhere else in your life or your past, that you don't think is something you'd like to have displayed for Jesus to see when He comes a calling, take comfort in that. He knows you already, but He still wants to come to you, still wants be with you, still wants you to invite Him in and receive Him.

Remember that. But it doesn't mean everything should *remain* the way it was. Once you see Jesus, Who He really is, You will not want Him to be a *guest* in your home, or stay in your house for just the *day*, will you?

Zacchaeus was thrilled to hear Jesus's words. The affirmation, in front of the religious leaders and the other Jews of Jericho. We are told he was wealthy. He was a tax collector for the Romans. And the people grumbled he was a notorious sinner. It is generally held that these tax collectors, put in these positions by the occupying Roman forces, were despised by their fellow Jews. Not only because they were identified with collecting these taxes for a foreign power but because those like Zacchaeus usually had not gotten rich on the honest salary of a hard working civil servant. But instead had subjected his neighbours to extortion by rendering unto Caesar what they duly owed under the Roman tax laws but collecting more than the right amount from the people and creaming the rest off for himself. In other words, the implication is that such tax collectors got rich not by honest toil but by dishonestly taking advantage of those who were in weaker positions. So he was wealthy, but not respected, much less loved, by the rest of his community. Therefore, not the type of person with whom they expected to see a miracle performing religious teacher, as many considered Jesus, and certainly not the *Messiah* they were expecting, as others had started to contend Jesus was, associating. So they were as shocked as Zacchaeus was to hear Jesus's words. And Zacchaeus was thrilled; the rest were displeased.

However there is obviously something more going on with Zacchaeus than the pride of being affirmed by Jesus, getting the last laugh, so to speak, on those who did not like him. So Zacchaeus *welcomed* Jesus, took Him into his house. Then takes place the *real action* that erupts when someone really *sees* Jesus. Zacchaeus repents of the wrong he knew he had been doing, realising immediately that it was going to be costly. He had now seen the Messiah, the Lord. And suddenly those things that he had coveted all along no longer mattered; wrong was recognised as wrong, unworthy of him. Up to then he had not let the disapproval of the others in the community stop him from his cheating to satisfy his lust, in his case for wealth. His fellow Jews had no doubt repeatedly reminded him to put it mildly, of God's laws from Leviticus on how to care for the poor, to love your neighbour as yourself and not to defraud him, and the specifics of the Ten Commandments' prohibitions on dishonesty and of coveting what was not rightfully his. But he had blissfully ignored all that. Now, immediately he received Jesus, not just physically into his house, but truly into his life, it confronted him like a wall.

St. John in the first chapter of his Gospel tells us that all who receive Christ are given the right to become children of God. Zacchaeus had received Christ; and immediately recognised that all that cheating and hard hearted greed was beneath his potential as a child of God. I will give half of my possessions to the poor, and I pay back four times the amount of anything I have cheated. St. John also helps us understand this about-face, in his first Epistle, Chapter 2: 17. The world and its desires pass away, but anyone who does the will of God lives forever. This is what transforms Zacchaeus. And swapping the emptiness of his ill gained wealth for the true treasure was a no-brainer, an inevitable by-product of his repentance and his receipt of the salvation in Christ, which Jesus confirmed for all to hear. St. John observes that one earthly outcome of salvation is that those who put their faith in Christ will find themselves compelled to endeavour to do what is right. Not that we suddenly start behaving perfectly, though God now accepts us as cleansed by the perfection of Christ, in whose decontaminating light we have taken shelter. But there is still the need to grow in Christ as we live on this Earth, where our human nature and its legacy of sin continue to tug at us, even waging war within us, or against your very souls as St. Paul [Ro. 7: 23] and St. Peter [1 Pt. 2: 11] warn the Christian. But one way that John explains the change we saw in Zacchaeus is that, Those who have been born into God's family through receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour do not make a practice of sinning because God's life is in them. So they cannot keep on sinning, because they are children of God. [1 Jn. 3: 9 NLT] Zacchaeus saw Christ and became a child of God. Then Zacchaeus saw himself - and with great relief threw off his old life of cheating others, of greed induced indifference to the plight of the poor. And eagerly embraced the potential to be so much more than he had been, grasped the fullness of life that God has made each of us capable of enjoying, and which Christ came to Earth so we could each reclaim.

If anyone of us has not seen Jesus, not heard Him making himself available to be invited in, as Zacchaeus did, he or she needs to ask why. For in Revelation 3, the risen Christ tells us all, Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. If we have not seen Jesus at the door of our heart, or walking by always within reach of us, why? Zacchaeus felt he could not see Jesus because his view would be blocked by all the people he had cheated, separating him from Jesus. But nevertheless he tried - he wanted to see Jesus. He cast off his pride, oblivious to the ridicule of a rich man reduced to climbing a tree, like a boy who cannot afford the entrance fee, and discovered to his relief that even all his cheating had not barred his access to Jesus. To the contrary, he heard Jesus saying I came to seek and to save you, Zacchaeus, one of those who had wandered away from God. What or who do you think is blocking your view, your access, keeping you from inviting Christ into your life? How are you trying to get to see Him? The Bible makes a point of recording that it was a sycamore tree, a sturdy tree, that Zacchaeus stood on to get his view. If it had been too flimsy it would have kept bending over the higher he tried to climb and he would have kept losing sight of Jesus. So make sure you are not standing on something too flimsy as we are always being offered flimsy things to pull ourselves up by, then we crash and end up right back on the ground. There is nothing firmer than the Word of God to stand on when you want to see Jesus.

Note also that Zacchaeus did not climb on to the backs of the people, even though up to that time he had been quite willing to cheat them. He would not have seen Jesus that way. I guess we could say St. Paul found that out the hard way. He only saw Jesus when he was struck blind as he rushed around persecuting the people he thought were blaspheming God. But *what a conversion* that ushered in. For 2,000 years no human has been better than St. Paul in demonstrating how such trampling on others is abhorrent to God, an act of *our* own sinful nature, *not* the fruit of God's Holy Spirit, Who requires us to *actively care* for others. Paul also realised that even what was termed his "great learning" had kept him from seeing the real God. We never know what it is that might be keeping us from seeing Jesus.

Immediately before our text for today, at the end of Luke 18, the blind beggar recognised Jesus as the Christ, calling Him by the Messianic title, Son of David, refusing to allow the crowd around him to shush him. And once again Jesus showed that when we want Him, no one else can block our access to Him either, just as the past sins of Zacchaeus and Saul did not block them from His embrace. And once again a life was dramatically changed, as whenever someone receives Jesus. Then this now healed man *followed* Jesus, causing others to also turn to God. That is the outcome God yearns for each of us. Neither your past nor anyone else can stop that. *Only you.* Will *you* let Christ in today?