

Zacchaeus and the Sycamore Tree (31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Wisdom of Solomon 11:22-12:2—God Hates Nothing He Has Made

1. Merciful: God “overlook[s] men’s sins, that they may repent” (11:23)
2. Love: God “loves all things that exist” (11:23)

Psalm 145—I Will Extol You, My God and King

1. Merciful: “the LORD is gracious and merciful” (v. 8)
2. Good: “the LORD is good to all” and has “compassion over all” (v. 9)

2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2—The Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ

1. Parousia: do not be “quickly shaken” regarding the “coming” of Jesus (2:1)

Luke 19:1-10: Zacchaeus and the Sycamore Tree

1. Jericho: border city; seems to have been a toll-center (19:1)
2. Zacchaeus: (Greek, *Zakchaios*; Hebrew, *Zakkai*) (cf. Neh 7:14; Ezr 2:9)
 - a. Meaning: “clean” or “innocent” (cf. Rabbi Yochanan ben *Zakkai*)
 - b. Synonym: “righteous” or “upright” (Hebrew *tzaddiq*)
 - c. “Chief Tax-Collector” (Greek *architelōnēs*)
 - d. Wealthy: “rich” (Greek *plousios*)
 - e. Tradition: became bishop of Caesarea (Ps.-Clementine *Hom.* 3.63.1)
3. Sycamore Tree: because he was “small of stature” (19:4)
4. Reparation: “if I have *shaken down* anything from anyone” (19:8)

“If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. He shall make restitution... (Exod 22:1-2)

5. Almsgiving and “Righteousness” (Hebrew *tzedakah*; cf. *b. Bab. Bathra* 9a):

For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore *I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land.* (Deut 15:11)

6. Salvation: has “come to this house”; “he also is a son of Abraham” (19:9)
7. Son of Man: “came to seek and to save the lost” (19:10; cf. Luke 15:1-32)

The Living Tradition

Jerome: There certainly is much truth in a certain saying of a philosopher, “Every rich man is either wicked or the heir of wickedness.” That is why the Lord and Savior says that it is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Someone may raise the

objection, “How did wealthy Zacchaeus enter the kingdom of heaven?” He gave away his wealth and immediately replaced it with the riches of the heavenly kingdom. The Lord and Savior did not say that the rich would not enter the kingdom of heaven but that they will enter with difficulty.” (Jerome, *Homily on Psalm 83* [84]; in A. Just, Jr., *Luke*, 290)
Augustine: Say what you like, but for our part, let us climb the sycamore tree and see Jesus. The reason you cannot see Jesus is that you are ashamed to climb the sycamore tree. Let Zacchaeus grasp the sycamore tree, and let the humble person climb the cross. That is little enough, merely to climb it. We must not be ashamed of the cross of Christ, but we must fix it on our forehead, where the seat of shame is. Above where all our blushes show is the place we must firmly fix that for which we should never blush.” (Augustine, *Sermon 174.3*; trans. in A. Just, Jr., *Luke*, 290-91)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1. What are the connections between the Old Testament reading and story of Zacchaeus the tax collector?

2. How does Zacchaeus’ act of reparation compare with Old Testament laws?

3. What does Jesus mean when he says that “salvation” has come to Zacchaeus’ house?

For Further Study

1. Arthur A. Just, Jr. *Luke*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament III. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003. Pp. 289-92
3. Pablo Gadenz. *The Gospel of Luke*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. Pp. 313-17.