

15th Sunday of Luke

...And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way...



Antiphon II.

Having lifted me up to the mountains of Your laws, brighten me with virtues, O God, that I may praise You.

With Your right hand embracing me, O Logos, be my keeper, shelter me, so that the fire of sin will not burn me.

Today's gospel speaks directly, with no fear, but rather with hope, to the heart of a rich community that does not know where to go today, when confronted with the shame of its own deeds. Eventually it catches up with you. The crisis that globally affects everybody today is not shared in responsibility by all. Of course, there is something that all of us need to receive and share, but then, there is also an invitation for those who defrauded everybody of everything to give it back fourfold. The riches which are stolen eventually get exposed publicly in so many different ways. Today we see what a system built up to make money out of aging people is going to do when confronted with a real situation that was not prefigured in the business plan. What does it do when a virus enters within the system? And this is only a small example. Today's crisis took a painful picture of the business paradigm that controls our life in all its aspects. Zacheus was coming from the same reality, the difference with him was that he exposed himself publicly, ridiculing himself within the community by climbing a tree. I always thought somehow that Zacheus was probably a good man. Rich but good. And out of the goodness of his heart he climbed the tree to see the good teacher that everybody loved, out of a good curiosity. And when he made the promise that he would pay back fourfold those whom he had defrauded, he probably had not cheated on too many people. Maybe a few times? For why would one really make such a promise if one had defrauded many? What would be left for you? Again, being a smart man, he probably knew that something was going to be there for himself at the end of the day.

It might have been that way. However, a comment from a poor villager in the Solentiname community changed my understanding. The poor villagers thought otherwise:

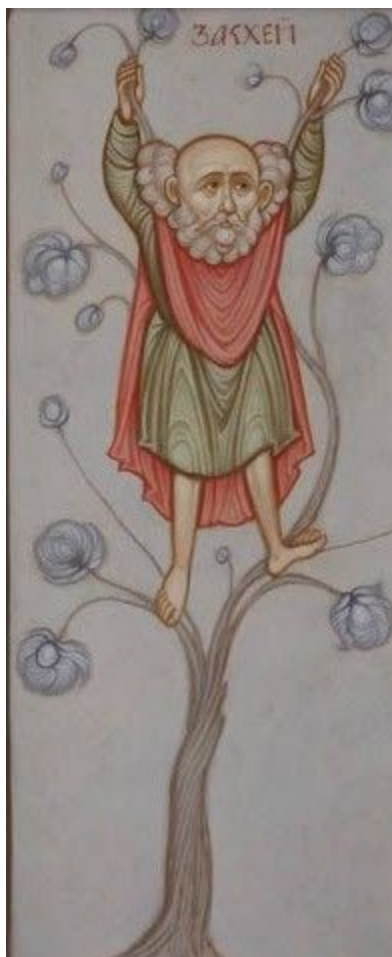
"It sounds like he'd done some stealing"

Of course he had; if he hadn't he wouldn't have been rich"...He must have been left with nothing. At first he intended to give half of what he had, which according to him was honestly earned, and give back four times what he'd stolen. But afterwards he'd gradually realized that everything he had was stolen" (page 506).

The poor will always understand better the corruption of a system because they are crushed daily by it. I remember, in Romania, corruption was something that people learned to put up with and found a way to tolerate. It was so much engraved in the structure of a poor society at the time, that you accept it as a "necessary evil" they would say, to which everybody has to pay its dues; the real power of an idol. At one point, after corruption was exposed many times publicly, people understood and recognized that "Corruption kills people". It took a few national tragic events, where people really died, for this to shift a needle in the cultural understanding of what corruption does to you. Nothing really changed in the structure, but at least it is not seen as a necessary evil by all today. The power of the idol decreased.

The truth is that in reality, any system that produces riches according to the "business paradigm" forgets slowly about correctness, fairness and common sense. Business becomes the first and only value that keeps everything and everybody in its pocket. There is nothing wrong in desiring a life full of goodness, where the fruits of the earth are given in abundance to be shared and partaken. We pray for that. Pursuing though only the profit, at the expense of any other value,

gives you nothing good in return. All the goods achieved like that leave you a bitter taste. And slowly it makes your soul get used to corruption, which is a plague that no vaccine has eradicated yet. And by getting used to it, the complicity with the system, as long as it makes your life comfortable, makes you numb and with no reaction to the national tragedies that we share now dailly. Also, it diminishes within you the understanding of what is good, what is true, what is beautiful. It makes heavy within yourself the only thing that makes us free, a clear conscience. To a point that we don't remember how to use it anymore. And then, the abuse happens within the community , all kinds of abuse , leaving us with no reaction from within ourselves. Because you got used to "comfort" and besides that, economically everything "makes sense". Everything else is allowed if it makes any sense economically. At the end even the economics make no more sense, but who can really understand and see that now?



Zachaeus was coming from this "economic" system where corruption kills people. He was the chief tax collector. His conscience should have been heavy. If you think of what the stealing and corruption have done to his soul. We should not think here only about the money, but for instance today, we should think, of all the elderly who are only good for profit, of the aggressive pressure in increasing the conditions for assisted suicide in Canada, because isn't that so, the system would breathe better if it was not for all these people it needs to spend money on; of the benefits of legalizing drugs, as a new growing industry in Canada; of the decision that people need to make in Ontario when taking care of the most vulnerable in the hospital. They are planning to give doctors the power to decide when treatment should be interrupted instead of having the family decide, for they know better how much it costs are involved in caring for a person on life support. And so on. There are so many examples. The thing is, all these would have not been possible, if we had at least considered profit as something secondary in our lives. Something that does not dictate our life and therefore does not influence any decision we make.

When climbing the sycamore tree, Zacheus, even small of stature, felt heavy. It took all his energy to make it on top. He should have suffered greatly because he caused great suffering in others, as we hear in the psalms, maybe even "hating his own soul". His encounter with Jesus is even more deep and

profound. It reveals a man who might have lost any hope in getting anything good out of himself. The encounter reavelas though, that the presence of hope in man's life is deeper than the distress

caused by his own sins. And this moves the man : the reality of hope. Not that anything good will come out of you, but that the goodness is coming your way. And , since you lost everything good within yourself, you want to see this Goodness. You don't really care about being publicly ridiculed because you have been ridiculed already. And this was always a small thing, considering the way your internal life was tormenting you.

Zacheus acts on this coming hope, which is more real than the reality of his own misery. He disregards himself but he is not afraid to behold the Truth because he believes there is nothing else for him to be afraid of. He had abandoned himself to corruption already. He wants to see what he lost. The purity and the beauty of Goodness.

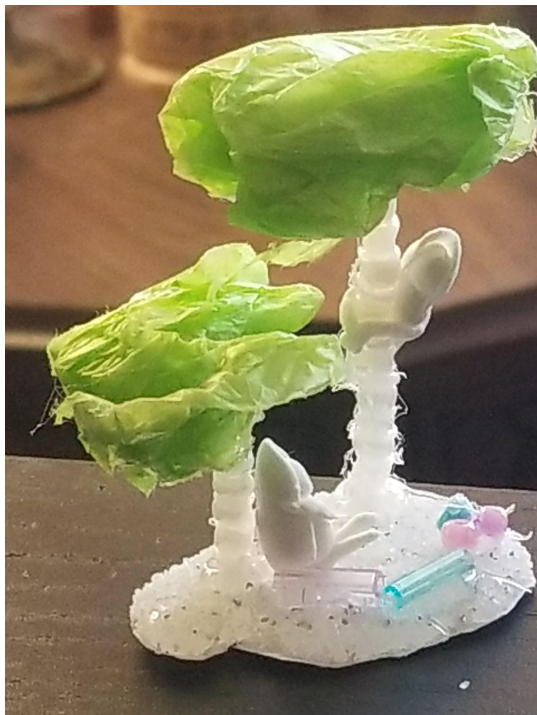
When his eyes encountered Jesus' eyes Zacheus' heart was already ready. Because the hope that was coming his way became a reality of his life. Because Goodness did not only remember his name but even more, He chose his hospitality, the one he did not have before. Jesus enters within the loneliness of a life that accumulated all the riches at the expense of its own soul (Lc12: 20).

And the soul rejoices greatly.

This made Zacheus poor, according to the villagers. However, in his poverty he discovered the richness of his soul and its goodness. Being adopted by the poor, Zacheus` house became a place where hope was going to dwell now.

All the times we see leaders coming in front of the media these days for all kinds of updates. Others, not so relevant, use social media channels to instruct us. It is like Zacchaeus on top of the tree. They ridicule themselves. So far so good, the problem is that they do not want to come down and receive nobody in their house. They remain there eternally, falling in love with their own lack of humor and common sense. It is not for us to say, but rather to come down from our own misery because they said unto us: *"Let us journey to the courts of the Lord, and so our spirit has been cheered, and our heart rejoices also"*

(Antiphon III).



From Thursday Gospel According to John 10:9-16:

" The Lord said, "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.... I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep..."

We often wonder at the mission how such a small community like ours is given to witness such great faith in the lives of people who pass through our doors, and the Word of God working with power in their lives. We don't know necessarily now, we pray we'll not be judged too harshly if we did not share that well with those who want to listen. It felt like that on Wednesday when we listened to the gospel of the day. It was like seeing how the Word of God touches the heart of the person. We shared our thoughts on the gospel after the service. When her turn came, one of the volunteers said that she was not a Christian and that she heard for the first time these words: "I am the good shepherd and I lay down my life for the sheep..." She paused, I thought she was not going to say anything else. It was a good reason for her to stay silent. But she didn't. After the pause she said it was comforting. That was what she felt. A great comfort coming from the Gospel. The word that she repeated was comfort and peace. Paraphrasing now, she spoke about this real comfort that is coming from knowing who God is. And that He takes care of us and that we know Him. His love for us comforts our souls.

Her words in the chapel on Wednesday spoke to our hearts as well. Because she spoke on behalf of all. Because her words were true. And we knew also, in that very moment, that this is who God is.

We may happen to read the same verses in the Gospel over and over again, without receiving the Truth whole heartedly. I think it depends on the time and the place we are in our life. On Wednesday, this did not matter, it felt again that her witness touched all our hearts at the same time and we knew that her words were true and not an idle tale.

We do look for comfort in our life. Zacheus' comfort, accumulated before meeting Jesus, was destroying his own soul. It was a fake one, built on deceit and bad business. The real comfort we desired is closer to us than we know. Just like Zacheus, our volunteer did not encounter the Word before through the gospel, but when she did hear Him on Wednesday, her witness of the truth of these words moved the hearts of all. And we knew that her testimony is true.

Please pray

Anthony and his wife Any and children Joseph and Elisabeth who are Christian refugees from Bangladesh

Members of Good Neighbours\St Zoticos

Jocelyn

Vassunt

Marshall

Daisy

John

Shuda

Roseau
AL Monica
Bob
Mary

The staff and residents, with families, of the Caressant Care Mclaughlin LTC home: 30 residents and staff who have tested positive for Covid-19.

Navpreet; Manpreet; Jamie; Sue; Reishma; Anne; Kevin; Bob; Nazia; Barb; Angie; Shaibi; Marilyn; Jean; Katie; Janine; Karen; Flora; Patricia; Katrina; Judy; Bob

From St John's
Camelia, Colin, Michael, Peter, Henry, George, Kelly, Michael; Tom; Steve