

Sunday of Zachaios Luke 19:1-10



"Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

Antiphon 3. (Orthros)

"I cried to You, O Lord. Attend to me. Incline Your ear to me who am crying, and purify me prior to taking me from this life. "

We have not seen Joseph in the morning at breakfast for quite some time now. The last time we saw him was just before he was about to have some surgery, so we don't know how that went. He used to come mostly in the morning, and, at times, he found time to talk about things in his life, about faith and meaning. He had respect, modesty and curiosity. And a sense of hope mixed with humour. He was living in very difficult circumstances, in a rooming house where drugs were paramount. He kept away from drugs, but he had to deal with the madness and fumes that surrounded him because of them. He lived for years in this hell, until he got a place in subsidized housing where the madness vanished. It was still a rooming house, but there were no problems with drugs there. For the first time, he was able to sleep at night in his room without feeling threatened, and without inhaling the leftover fumes. Stepping from hell to heaven took him some time, but eventually it happened. And he was grateful. One morning, he let us know in a casual manner that they found a problem with one of his kidneys. He assumed it was because of the fumes he had inhaled. He told us he will need surgery. He did not look scared and he asked for prayers. He was still grateful for the new home he had.

What could be the resemblance between Joseph and Zachaeus? They could not be more different. Zaccheus, being rich, lived a life in which he made many compromises

in order to have a certain type of prosperity. He meets Jesus and he and his household are redeemed in the community. Joseph on the other hand, being poor, lived all his life trying not to compromise and eventually he got awfully sick. His life was hidden from the community and today we don't even know (because we live in Toronto in 2026) if the surgery was successful or not. We don't know whether he is still in the hospital, recovering after his surgery, or back in his new room where the light does not have to look over its shoulders to chase away the fumes. They could not be more different, however, there is a solitude that brings them very close to each other. That makes them share the same room.

Joseph might help us to understand a little bit the heart of Zacheus. How many people with similar stories would have seen Zachaeus while he was collecting money for the Roman empire? At times, he would even enter their homes in order to get their last penny. Zachaeus came across many human realities, adding to them the burden of taxes. He came across human suffering, not being able to comfort it in any way, on the contrary, taking a price of money. It was like selling for money the suffering of your brother or sister. What happens to a human heart when it is exposed to the intimacy of human brokenness, without being able to express any form of kindness? Simply because one is an instrument of the system that is designed to make sure that the humanity remains broken, controlled and vulnerable. Zachaeus was caught, like many modern people, in a circle. Even if he wanted to change something he could not. He needed Christ, as Carlos mentioned on Friday, to make him change. Nobody else could have made that possible. The Roman empire used him only for collection, the law and those who administered the law labeled him as unclean and the people in the village excluded him completely, and probably never forgave him. We see that from their reaction when Jesus tells Zachaeus that he needs to stay at his house that day. Zachaeus was living in this circle with no hope of change. Living with the sorrow of not being able to comfort, to care and to embrace human brokenness. Because he was excluded, because he was unclean, because he had a job to do, because he was a sinner. When he heard about Jesus passing by, he had an intuition of something new that touched his heart. That gave birth within him to the desire to see. And he makes sure to do all that is necessary for that to happen. Jesus sees him first and when he makes him new, he also heals what was broken within the community. He gives new

life and restoration to Zacheus and forgiveness for the whole community at large. Because they were lacking that.

Modern man resembles Zacheus well. Always caught in a circle with nothing new to inspire his life with hope for redemption and change. And just like Zacheus, the modern man can do nothing by himself. He needs Christ, just like Zacheus did. Today the modern man needs the church, where he can encounter fully His body and partake of Him. Like the people from the village, we can condemn the modern man and ourselves. Because we can do nothing on our own. It is precisely why we were brought within the church so we can be touched by the miracle. By the right hand that cares. To be touched and see that we can embrace what we thought we couldn't because of our own poverty. To have the revelation of new life in us that is sensitive to the pain of others. To realize that the time we have been wasting in this meaningless generation is redeemed in the time we become present to the other one. To have the experience within us that we are forgiven.

Jesus must stay at Zacchaeus' house before entering Jerusalem (in the gospel of Luke). The events, even if not consequently linked, are very close to each other. Before being rejected in Jerusalem, Jesus asks hospitality from the one that is marginalized by the community because of his sins. The brokenness of the community life brings alienation to the soul of both the poor and the rich. To the innocent and to the sinner. The innocent is crucified while the sinner is suffering alone in silence. Because there is no new place that can bring reconciliation to both and salvation for the sinner.

As we break today the Vasilopita, we remember what the life of the community does both for the sinners with no hope of redemption and for the innocents who receive no witness of their victory over death and violence. We remember that in a modern time we live in the church where the cry of the broken hearted is heard, and where the sinners attend to and care for them. We give thanks today for seeing and partaking of communal life, where Christ, in the poor, receives daily the repentance of the rich man, whose heart has been sensitized to new life and to salvation. It has been sensitized to his brother and sister in order for the entire community to receive forgiveness. The heart of the modern man has the potentiality of Zacchaeus' repentance. It is chosen by Jesus to give hospitality to the innocent one that walks the

path of life, confronting the violence in us. The heart of the modern man has within itself the hidden generosity to give half of itself to the poor because it has discovered the love it had lost. And the other half to mercy (tzedek), because it pledges to participate in communion by looking always for forgiveness in those whom it has hurt. Thus, the debt is restored, until healing fully replaces brokenness of communion. Because of the sorrow that Zacheus carries with him, the modern man has the potential to experience today the kingdom of heaven. He needs only to encounter the body of Christ in order to be inspired to new life. We celebrate today in Toronto the Body of Christ, the church, broken and distributed for the last 40 years, like the bread today. For the sake of the Resurrection and of Christ Himself. And we pray for Him to teach us all gratitude and thanksgiving.

Community life:

You are invited to share in a study of the Psalms every Tuesday, through Zoom, from 7:30 to 8:30 pm. This has been going on since covid days.

WHY?

This is what St. Basil says to us:

Any part of the Scriptures you like to choose is inspired by God. The Holy Spirit composed the Scriptures so that in them, as in a pharmacy open to all souls, we might each of us be able to find the medicine suited to our own particular illness. Thus, the teaching of the Prophets is one thing, and that of the historical books is another. And, again, the Law has one meaning, and the advice we read in the Book of Proverbs has a different one. But the Book of Psalms contains everything useful that the others have. It predicts the future, it recalls the past, it gives directions for living, it suggests the right behavior to adopt. It is, in short, a jewel case

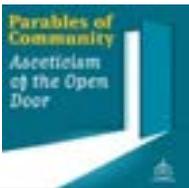
in which have been collected all the valid teachings in such a way that individuals find remedies just right for their cases.

It heals the old wounds of the soul and gives relief to recent ones. It cures the illnesses and preserves the health of the soul.

Every Psalm brings peace, soothes the internal conflicts, calms the rough waves of evil thoughts, dissolves anger, corrects and moderates profligacy. Every Psalm preserves friendship and reconciles those who are separated. Who could actually regard as an enemy the person beside whom they have raised a song to the one God?

Every Psalm anticipates the anguish of the night and gives rest after the efforts of the day. It is safety for babes, beauty for the young, comfort for the aged, adornment for women.

Every Psalm is the voice of the Church.



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We are an apostolate of the ecumenical patriarchate "Mother Church of Christ's poor" under the Omophoron of Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

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