



ACTA
LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Year C
Year of Luke

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READINGS

A reading from the book of Wisdom 11:22 - 12:2

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 144:1-2. 8-11. 13-14. R/. cf. v.1

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians

1:11-2:2

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke 19:1-10

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The book in our Bible entitled *The Wisdom of Solomon* is flying under false colours. It was not written by King Solomon, the

son of David. In the early days of Christianity many books were attributed to Solomon. The list is impressive: the Song of Songs, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and other books not found in our Bibles. Apart from the fact that Solomon's reputation for wisdom is somewhat exaggerated, these books are much later than the time of Solomon's kingship. The Book of Wisdom, from which today's first reading is taken, was written in Greek and its wisdom and style far exceed anything that might have been penned by that ancient king. The great Jewish scholar, Philo of Alexandria (a contemporary of Jesus who died around 50 A.D.) was sometimes credited with the authorship of this work but that, too, is very unlikely.

Every effort is made to establish the dates when books of the Bible were written. But even in the case of our four Gospels, the letters of St Paul, and all the other material in the New Testament, we can be certain of only a few. The search for certainty will continue because the context of each book is an essential clue to meaning. If we could be certain of the who, where, when, and why of each book of the Bible, we would be more confident of interpreting them and with understanding what they may teach us in our time and place.

What we can say of the Book of Wisdom is that it is a superb meditation on a wide range of issues at the heart of Jewish and Christian faith. It reflects on the destiny of righteous people (chapters 1-5) and is entirely optimistic, in contrast to the Book of Ecclesiastes or the Wisdom of ben Sirach. Its advice to kings (chapters 6 to 10) would not go amiss in our times. Human wisdom is set in the context of God's perspective on creation. It is a gift from God, the creator and guardian of all that exists, and the giver of knowledge and true guide of life. Wisdom is, in fact, a gift of God's holy spirit. Chapters 11 to 19 are an extended praise of God. Reviewing the story of God's people, the author highlights how God is both the creative and protective force for righteousness in our world.

It is vital to realise that the entire book is a poetic production. Today's reading begins with two delightful similes:

... like a speck that tips the scales

... like a drop of morning dew.

Space exploration has made us aware that we live on a tiny, insignificant planet. Wisdom teaches that though we are but a speck, we are embraced by mercy and forgiveness. The God who created "the whole world" "loves all things that exist", and "loathes none of the things that you have made". There is no room for hatred in God's regard for the work of his hands. God is the One "who loves all the living". Why? Because God's spirit dwells in every human heart:

... your Immortal spirit is in all things".

There is more than a touch of Plato in today's text. The great Greek philosopher insisted that the maker of all things, the creator of the world who it its soul,

... was good...and desired that all things should be as far as possible like himself

Plato's *Timaeus* 23e

Essential to today's reading is the forceful declaration that God is a God of love and the influence of that declaration is most profoundly underlined in John' Gospel, a text mightily indebted to the Book of Wisdom. It is surely significant that Wisdom's declaration is rooted in Jewish biblical faith and in the rational expositions of Greek philosophy.

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 145:1-2. 8-11. 13-14. R/. cf. v.1

OF DAVID. A SONG OF PRAISE

*R/. I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.*

*I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.*

*Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever. R/.*

*The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

*The LORD is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made. R/.*

*All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
and all your saints shall bless you!*

*They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom
and tell of your power. R/.*

*The LORD is faithful in all his words
and kind in all his works.*

*The LORD upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.*

*R/. I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.*

Songs of Praise!

Today's Responsorial Psalm is the only psalm in the 150 psalms that is designated as A Song of Praise. The title of the Book of Psalms in Hebrew is *tehilim*, which means *Songs of Praise*. By no means are songs of praise the most frequent in

Israel's glorious collection of prayers. The majority of psalms are appeals to God for divine assistance when confronted with the challenges facing individuals or the whole community of Israel. But Psalm 145 begins the last six psalms, and all of these are songs of praise. It is as if, in the end, when all other prayers are said, the most holy and wholesome thought is to praise the LORD, the LORD who abounds in steadfast love:

*The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The LORD is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made.*

The psalm is full of words expressing praise: extol, bless, praise, exalt. It is full, to, of why praise must be given to the Lord who is "My God and King", not a king who oppresses and battens off the people. This Lord and King is,

*Gracious
Merciful
Slow to anger
Abounding in steadfast love
Good to all
Glorious
Powerful
Faithful
Upholds all who are falling
Raises up all who are bowed down
Gives food in due season
Righteous in all his ways*

- and much more besides.

Psalm 145 is a psalm that, in the midst of all that afflicts humanity, invites us to take stock and to count our blessings. Above all, the psalm invites us to renewed faith and to steadfast hope that, if this be our God, then the words of Julian of Norwich will come to pass:

All will be well, all manner of thing will be well.

**A reading from the second letter of St Paul to the
Thessalonians** 1:11-2:2

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfil every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come'

The word of the Lord.

Thessaloniki, (modern spelling), in the very north of Greece, is the second city of Greece after Athens, a city of industry, trade, and a port of great importance to the Greek economy. It suffered very badly during World War II and its large Jewish population was slaughtered in great numbers.

The ancient city was no less important. As it lay on the Roman road it facilitated traffic from east to west and west to east.

In or around 50 A.D. Paul wrote to a tiny Christian community in Thessalonika that he had founded a few months

earlier. Most scholars believe that this letter is the earliest surviving piece of Christian writing. It is, therefore, an insight into the concerns of a little church brought into existence only twenty years after the death of Jesus. It is a very warm and affectionate letter to a community grappling with matters of concern, apparently reported to Paul by his companion Timothy.

The Second Letter to Thessalonian Christians seems to deal with issues that were of concern to Christians after the death of Paul. The second letter presumes that Christians in Thessalonica seem to be enduring great and continuous persecution:

... we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

II Thessalonians 1:4

Then there appears to be a belief that the second coming of the Lord has already happened and the community in Thessalonika has missed out:

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

II Thessalonians 2:1-3

A third issue of concern, of which there is no trace in the initial letter of St Paul, is this:

Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from

us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

II Thessalonians 3:6-12

These issues contradict the warm-hearted and affirmative praise that Paul lavishes on the tiny community he founded:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

I Thessalonians 1:1-5

Paul speaks with great pride and gratitude for the reception he and his companions received when they proclaimed the gospel of God to those who heard him in that great city:

You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and

in Achaia. For not only has the word of the LORD sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere ...

I Thessalonians 1:5-7

The arguments concerning when and by whom books in the New Testament were written are of concern because it is important to date the progress of the Christian message as it spread from an upstairs room in Jerusalem to Syria, the huge Roman province of Asia Minor, to Greece, and to the city of Rome. And, of course, the gospel of God went south to Egypt and to Ethiopia. These beginnings are our beginnings; the faith of our eastern fathers and mothers is our faith.

There is, then, a fairly general consensus that the Second Letter to Thessalonians was not written by Paul of Tarsus. It comes from after the death of Paul (probably around 64 A.D.) and deals with issues that were a concern some years after the great apostle's execution. What we can be sure of is that this anonymous letter was written to deal with an issue that crops up regularly in Christianity, both past and present. Whenever you see someone with a mortarboard screaming that THE END IS NIGH, you are in the world of Second Thessalonians and the world of 2000 A.D. Indeed, there are many Christians today who live in the sure and certain conviction that the end is just around the corner.

What is important is that we attend to what Second Thessalonians has to say on the matter for the advice given by this unknown writer is relevant to our uncertain times.

Almost always the letters of Paul and those letters in imitation of the great apostle, begin with prayer. The Thessalonian Christians are undergoing persecution of some kind. Their suffering concerns all Christians and the writer of this letter assures them that God will not restrain his avenging angels: they will inflict vengeance,

... on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might ...

II Thessalonians 1:8-9

The sentences before today's reading spell out what awaits those who obstruct the progression of the God's word. At the second coming of Jesus "in flaming fire" those opposed to God will suffer:

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

II Thessalonians 1:9-10

Those who reject the gospel that comes to us in and through Jesus will suffer the wrath of God that is summed up in a phrase: *punishment of eternal destruction*. This "destruction" is defined as exclusion "from the presence of the Lord".

The destiny of those who die enemies of God is painted in images found in the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah is a frequent source of such vengeful images:

*For behold, the LORD will come in fire,
and his chariots like the whirlwind,
to render his anger in fury,
and his rebuke with flames of fire.
For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment,
and by his sword, with all flesh;
and those slain by the Lord shall be many.*

Isaiah 66:15-16

Future generations of Christians will paint horrific pictures of the fate of the wicked on whom God has inflicted vengeance. However, while most of us can identify ourselves on the roof of the Sistine Chapel, that is just a magnificent painting and its creator had no more insight into God's future than any one of us. We must not believe that our fertile imaginations are capable of plumbing the depths of God's love, the only love that endures forever.

What the author of this letter recommends is prayer. We must pray that God will make us worthy of his calling and that we may do what is good, fulfil every work our faith demands so that we may reflect the glory of God in a world of darkness.

As the author insists, we know little of the details and all of the certainty. We must be excited or alarmed at reports concerning the day of the Lord's coming. It hasn't happened and when it will happen is not revealed to us. Our vocation is to love the truth and to reflect the glory of God in our world. There is much meditation to be done on the vocation to which we are called as outlined in a few sentences in the letter:

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

II Thessalonians 2:13-17

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke 19:1-10

[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "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."

The Gospel of the LORD.

The Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke are full of tax collectors and sinners. Tax collectors are mentioned 29 times. In Luke, there are 12 such. Sinners, too, people the pages of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. However, while sinners crop up in Mark and Matthew 7 times each, Luke weaves them into his story 13 times. It is true to say that Luke's pages are full of ne'er-do-wells and has-beens. But the miracle in Luke is that his outsiders become insiders, and all his insiders are on the way to becoming outsiders. In his very first chapter he has Mary announce the programme. The "strength of the LORD'S arm" in the *Magnificat* is the child to be born, the one who will, on God's behalf, scatter the proud and bring down the mighty:

*He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;*

*he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

Luke 1:51-53

It is worth reviewing Luke's near obsession with tax collectors. Remember that in his society Jews (and they are all Jews in Luke's Gospel) who collected taxes were traitors for they were an essential part of the Roman apparatus of coercion, oppression, and exploitation. They impoverished their own people. It is estimated that taxes on peasants were regularly 40%, sometimes rising to 70% of their produce. Until the 18th century industrial revolution, there was only one industry on which all other wealth was based, namely, agriculture. Tax collectors were instruments of impoverishment. They were sinners because they took the wealth of God's holy land and gave it to pagans. The ranks of sinners were, therefore, full of people doing the dirty work that so enriched the little man from Jericho.

But there is more to Luke's craftsmanship than merely mentioning lots of tax collectors and other noted sinners. What is at the heart of Luke's theology is mercy and mercy is the handmaid of conversion. The programme presented in Luke's pages is not new; it was laid down centuries before the child was born in Bethlehem. Its arrival was at the heart of the proclamation of John, the son of Zechariah:

... all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Luke 3:6 (quoting Isaiah 40:5)

What Jesus himself proclaimed in the synagogue of people assembled in Nazareth was that he came to gospel the poor, to liberate captives to sin and oppression, to give sight to the blind who cannot see God, to set free people oppressed by

Satan and Satan's worldly agents, and, above all, to announce to the world that our time is in a time of God's favour. When Jesus unrolled the scroll he read himself into God's story:

*He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,
 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
 because he has anointed me
 to proclaim good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
 and recovering of sight to the blind,
 to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
 to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favour*

Luke 4:18-19

To come to the very heart of Luke's enterprise it is necessary to see how he takes tax collectors, the worst of sinners, and see how Jesus transforms them. In doing so, he exposes the uncaring rich and warns them that they are in danger of becoming lost sheep that may never be found.

Tax collectors (and sinners)

There is a very encouraging start to the tax collectors stories in Luke's drama:

Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do".

Luke 3:12

John the Baptist's requirements are not as demanding as those of Jesus. But it's a start.

When Jesus finds Matthew the tax collector at the receipt of custom, one phrase leaps out :

*After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." And **leaving everything**, he rose and followed him.*

Luke 5:27

When Pharisees and their scribes grumbled (as everyone does in the Zacchaeus story), Jesus again repeats the programme that God has placed on his shoulders:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Luke 5:31-32

When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to inquire whether Jesus was "the one who is to come", Jesus is eager to proclaim the rôle of John in God's scheme of things:

I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. Luke 7:28-30

Jesus himself provides a very telling comparison between himself and John and how each is condemned for doing what God demands of them:

John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a

friend of tax collectors and sinners! ' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.

Luke 7:33-35

Luke's chapter 15 opens with an acceptance and rejection, acceptance by the dregs of society and rejection by the religious teachers.

*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes **grumbled**, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them".*

Luke 15:1

The answer to this grumbling is writ large in three parables: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and two lost sons (one needing forgiveness? — easy-peasy; and one needing a heart transplant? — dodgy).

Next we listen to a tax collector and a Pharisee praying in the presence of God in the Temple (Luke 18:9-14). One prayer is heard.

The next tax collector is the tree climber Zacchaeus.

The rich

Before we meet Zacchaeus, we must look at how the rich fare in Luke's estimation.

Rich, riches, richer, richest, richly—these words occur 172 times in the ESV translation of our Bible, not all in a condemnatory sense. Luke comments 22 times on riches, wealth, and possessions. Famously, there is the rich man and the poor man at his gate (Luke 16:19-31). But our worry about being rich starts with Luke's version of Mary's hymn:

... the rich he has sent empty away.

Luke 1:53

Which of us does not excuse ourselves from obeying an invitation from the Son of God:

Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 12:33-34

If we were to accept this good counsel, we would receive from our Father in heaven “the kingdom”. But are we ready to chance it? Even though we are cautioned:

Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Luke 12:15

We are told bluntly to take on board a bald, plain, unambiguous statement:

Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Luke 6:24

For Luke’s beatitudes provide no hiding place. Matthew may provide a safe retreat:

Blessed are the poor in spirit ...

Matthew 5:3

But Luke is uncompromising:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Luke 6:20

One more story must be negotiated before we arrive at Jericho. It is not in our Sunday Lectionary. But without it we are ill-equipped to grasp what is happening when the rich tax collector is bidden to climb down the sycamore tree. It is the story of an extremely rich ruler:

And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother.' " And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.

Luke 18:18-30

Throughout his Gospel Luke has been evaluating what it means to be rich and what it means to be poor in the sight of God. By the standards of the world, to be rich is to be safe, comfortable, healthy, and powerful. To be poor is to be poor in every aspect of living. Yet Luke's Gospel points out that the

rich live a very precarious existence. The rich man may very well be “clothed in purple and fine linen, and feast sumptuously every day” (Luke 16:19). His may depend on bigger barns but death may intervene (Luke 12:13-21). You who are rich may invite your rich friends and get nothing in return except a return invitation—and miss out on an invitation “at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14).

You may be a rich ruler, even a devout rich ruler, and you may obey every commandment from your youngest days. Yet more may be required of you:

Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me.

Luke 18:22

Zacchaeus

Luke has led us to Jericho and every step of the way has been marked, being with Jesus. Jesus turned his face to go to Jerusalem, for the time was drawing near for him to be taken up (Luke 9:51). Every step of the way has been marked by an invitation to walk the way with him. His disciples and the crowds are bidden to understand what is to happen in the Holy City and yet to walk the walk. To learn from him how to live and to accept that calling, is to take up the cross marked out for each disciple by him who goes before. To enter the kingdom of God is to embrace the way of steadfast love. It is to belong to a service of love. To be in kingdom of God is to be a reflection of steadfast love, to be part of the sun of God shining in the darkness of the world. To be as Ezekiel imagined it would be:

shining like awe- inspiring crystal

Ezekiel 1:22

Or, to be as the psalmist prays:

*Make your face shine on your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.*

Psalm 31:15

Or, as the Second Letter of Peter puts it:

*a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning
star rises in your hearts*

II Peter 1:19

The rich may be part of the kingdom Jesus is founding, but the terms are those accepted by the little man in Jericho.

The first thing to notice about Zacchaeus is that he was not a tax collector. He was something that didn't exist. He was an *architelōnēs*, usually translated as “a chief tax collector”. But this is a word found here and nowhere else in Greek literature. Luke is making it up. The taxation regime was not a structured civil service. Individuals bid for the right to collect taxes in a given area and profited from exacting as much as possible. But Luke is inventing a word and a job in order to emphasise that Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector, the sinner supreme. Not only that, the so-and-so is rich. Greek sentences tend to put the emphasis on the last word or phrase. So Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus is always in the Gospels mentioned last in the lists of the Twelve. What Luke has done is to underline that this tax collector is rich, filthy rich. We shall see if what is impossible with mere human beings, is possible with God.

Secondly he was seeking to see “who Jesus was”. Zacchaeus' curiosity is not that of Herod who,

... had longed desired to see him because he had heard about him, and was hoping to see some sign done by him.

Luke 23:8

The little man desired to see who Jesus was, precisely who this preacher from Galilee really was. His desire to see who Jesus really was is best understood by likening it to that question asked by the disciples in the boat when Jesus calmed the storm:

Who then is this that the wind and the sea obey him?

Mark 4:41

So he, being a small man, climbed up a sycamore tree. When he came to the place, Jesus stopped, he looked up, and he spoke—a very deliberate and purposed-filled sentence. Jesus knew him by name, another surprise. While anyone familiar with climbing trees will know that you may make haste going up but it is advisable to take your time coming down. But Luke is telling the story and emphasising the fact that Jesus knows who Zacchaeus and is urgent in his determination to come to his house:

For today I must stay at your house.

Luke 19:5

The “must” here does not mean that Jesus is thinking it would be nice to visit with the little man. Jesus is not tired, not seeking a little rest. No. That “must”, as so often in all the Gospels, means that Jesus must do what God demands. Here it means that God has determined that Jesus, “my beloved son”, must stay at the house of this man, on this day. God has a purpose in bringing Jesus to this house. Zacchaeus is beginning to know Jesus. This stranger has called him by his

name. He does as he has been told: he hurried down and welcomed him (not “received him”) joyfully.

Of course there are begrudgers, the same as those who murmured against Moses, for God’s concern is often stymied by human smallness of mind and heart. Notice that the murmuring is against Jesus because “he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner”. They fail to realise that Jesus, alert to his Father’s will, is well aware that Zacchaeus is a sinner. For precisely that reason Jesus is glad to be welcomed into his house.

Zacchaeus stands up against such self-righteousness and confesses “to the Lord”. Half his goods are signed over to the poor. People who have been defrauded will receive fourfold restitution. That is what you call penance and a firm purpose of amendment.

It is Jesus himself who provides the meaning of what has occurred in the house of the filthy-rich chief tax collector of Jericho:

Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

Luke 19:9

Zacchaeus is one of God’s people, the very people into whom Jesus was born. Mary warned us that this would happen:

*He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy.*

Luke 1:54

But mercy is not cabined, cribbed, confined:

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:10

Notice that God-in-Jesus is seeking out the lost. Being lost means that alarm bells ring in heaven and that the search is on and God is in pursuit. It is very difficult for Christians to accept that to be lost is to be found. There are murmurers still.

His parents gave their new-born son the name Zacchaeus. In Hebrew his name means “the pure one”. He is now.

Joseph O'Hanlon