



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday's Gospel tells of our Lord's encounter with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector of the city of Jericho. As we prepare to begin the Triodion on February 9<sup>th</sup>, "Zacchaeus Sunday" demonstrates the importance of repentance, as we look to that season that will bring us Great Lent, Holy Week, and Pascha.

In the Holy Land of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, as in our year pf 2020, tax collectors were not particularly well loved. During Christ's ministry, however, these feelings were more negative, since tax collectors, as Jews, extorted money from their fellow citizens to pay their Roman masters.

Even so, Zacchaeus, like most of the citizens of Jericho, wished to see Jesus. However, the Gospel tells us that Zacchaeus "*could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature.*" (Luke 19:2) Being a clever man, Zacchaeus decided to climb into a

sycamore tree, in order to give himself a better view.

Jesus, knowing all things, stopped as He was passing by the tree, looked up, and said, "*Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.*" (Luke 19:6) Zacchaeus was naturally very happy to hear that Jesus wished to visit him, but the crowd was, of course, scandalized, saying to one another, "*He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.*" (Luke 19:7)

Though Zaccheus knew what his neighbors thought of him, he was so moved, he was immediately inspired to change his ways, telling Jesus, "*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold.*" (Luke 19:8) Zacchaeus obviously understood that his practice of extorting his neighbors was wrong, and so he decides to begin the process of true and sincere repentance.

Christ, knowing the hearts of all Zaccheus' shocked neighbors, demonstrates His purpose, when He says, "*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.*" (Luke 19:9-10) As we prepare for a solemn season of reflection, prayer and fasting, my hope is that we to look to Christ, who continues to ask that we allow Him to come dwell within our hearts. We must consider the ways in which we will purify our hearts, in order to welcome Him, both during our Church's holiest season, and always.

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