

*The Nazareth Page*  
*A gospel meditation for your home*  
*November 3, 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*Luke 19:1-10*

Imagine what it's like to walk down the street and know that everyone you pass casts a hateful glance in your direction. They might even utter a few chosen bad words your way. That was the fate of Zacchaeus whom we meet in today's gospel. The reason for his bad reputation had to do with his occupation. He was the chief tax collector for the Romans, hated occupiers of Jericho, a town that stood near the Jordan River, a little east of Jerusalem. No good Jew liked Zacchaeus.

As the reputation spread of Jesus being a very special person of God, crowds gathered to watch him as he passed through various towns and villages. Zacchaeus wanted to see him, so he stood hiding in the shadows by the roadside, which ended up being less than a good idea because he was short. Short people see better when standing in the front, not in the back.

Jesus was quite observant and to the surprise and displeasure of everyone, called out to the diminutive tax collector. "How about dinner at your place?" Everyone, including Zacchaeus, was shocked. Jesus was known to be a good man while we know what the crowd thought of the local tax man. After all, he was charged with getting as much money from the locals as possible. For this task he was backed by Roman swords. And if he did well, he could pocket some of the take for himself. We're told that he was a rich man, and in this context, that was not a complement. Nevertheless, Jesus sought his company. Sharing a meal in those times (and in ours) indicated a positive connection.

Once again, we are reminded of how Jesus surprised his contemporaries. He was utterly generous in the many ways he related to all those he encountered. He always sought out the poor and the needy. And we might read between the lines here that Zacchaeus needed a friend. He might have been tired of always having to eat alone. Who would want to dine with one like him?

The answer is that Jesus would. There is no limit to his desire to befriend all. No matter what their social standing or personal characteristics. This is also the message of Pope Francis. Some are bothered by the pope's desire to, as he puts it, go to "the margins of society" and encounter all those in need of help and support. Poor or rich, tall or short. Everyone is welcome. Look around and see who's in need of your companionship.

David M. Thomas, PhD

*The Nazareth Page*  
*A gospel meditation for your home*  
*November 10, 2019 – 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*Luke 20:27-38*

As each of us ages, we might not only call forth memories from our past, but also look to our futures in this life -- and in what follows. From today's gospel we learn that there was not agreement among the Jews at the time of Jesus about what awaits us after we die. Jesus, however, said that our lives will not end. He responded to their inquiries not by offering any details except the provocative words that for God "all are alive." That includes you and me. Now and forever.

There is no mention of pearly gates, angels strumming on celestial harps or streets paved with gold. But we can bank on one extremely important idea: we will be with God!

And added from our belief in the Communion of Saints, we can also conclude that we will also be with each other. And when you think about that, this is enough of a picture to give us not only hope for the future, but we can imaginatively forecast a bit of what it will be like. Our biggest clue for this comes from the Resurrection of Jesus.

Like Jesus our bodies will become "risen." That means we will probably not be invisible spirits but be bodily and remain fully human. Much like we are right now, but a whole lot better. There will be no sickness or suffering or sore backs. No unpaid bills or unfortunate circumstances wearing us down. No inconsiderate noisy neighbors; no more wars.

I like to imagine we will be reconnected with beloved family members, friends and people we knew during our earthly lives. And many others too. Pope Francis was once asked if our pets would be there too. While he was not offering formal apostolic infallible teaching, he did say, "Why not?"

During his lifetime on earth, there are many accounts of Jesus eating with others. After he rose from the dead, he appeared at the shore of Lake Galilee and prepared a breakfast for his followers. Will he be doing something similar in the next life? Will we be served the best wine like those at the wedding feast at Cana? Will he be sharing dinner with us like he did with Zacchaeus, which heard about in last Sunday's gospel? To all of these questions, I echo the pope's response, "Why not?"

But the very best part will be that we will be with God who has to be the most wonderful reality imaginable. No, beyond all imagination. And there will be no calendar or clock or even day and night. Total happiness, non-stop. And it will never end.

David M Thomas, PhD

*The Nazareth Page*  
*A gospel meditation for your home*  
*November 17, 2019 – 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*Luke 21:5-19*

When our children were younger, the most common question I heard as we made our way home, or to the playground, or to their grandparents' place was, "Are we there yet?" The ability to ask this question is issued almost as soon as a child is able to speak. Children can be impatient. And if we are honest, so can adults. Think of this as you hear the followers of Jesus asking him if "the End" is near. Today's gospel, which comes near the end of the church's year, is timely.

The "end" referred to comes from the belief in those days that soon would occur an end of time when God would be triumphant over all the evil in the world. This belief was a hot topic when Jesus lived. There were many theories of how this would come about. Some made their way into the pages of the Bible and some were simply popular theories created by people wanting attention. Even today there is belief in a soon-to-happen second coming of Jesus. Polls suggest that a sizable number of our contemporaries believe this awe-inspiring event will happen in their lifetimes. So too did a number of early Christians right after his resurrection. That was 2000 years ago.

Knowing that Jesus knew a lot more than anyone about the things of God, it's no surprise that he was asked (probably more than once) when the end would come. He answered them by talking about some rough times ahead. Then, both nature and humans would seem to be out of control. There would be persecution of his followers. But he refused to give his questioners a date. Even an approximate one.

His advice was to remain attentive to what God might be doing in their midst, and basically, keep the faith. Don't quit, no matter what happens. Being a Christian is not about being popular or prosperous. It is more about being prayerful and persistent. Let God take care of "the End." Our job is to attend to the present and all its demands.

As we approach the end of this year, we might look back and see how we did with last January's New Year resolutions. This is not to create guilt but to remind us that we are on a journey. Course corrections are often needed. Perhaps there were times when our faith and trust in God was tested. Maybe it had to do with children or grandchildren. Maybe with ourselves. In today's gospel Jesus reminds us that there are always a few bumps along the way. Sometimes we need to take a detour. All of that is okay. Just keep your eye on the final goal. And God will not just meet us at the end, but God accompanies us all along the way. Focus your attention on now, the most important time in your life.

David M. Thomas, PhD

*The Nazareth Page*  
*A gospel meditation for your home*  
*November 24, 2019 – Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe*  
*Luke 23:35-43*

It is the last Sunday of the Church Year. To grasp the importance of this Sunday, imagine yourself standing at the side of the road, watching a long parade pass by. There are decorated floats, marching bands and if you are watching the annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, large inflated figures sail by above you in the wind. Strong ropes held by muscular men keep Snoopy and his friends from straying away from the parade route. The parade culminates with the arrival of Santa Claus on perhaps the most decorated float of all. Small children wonder, "Is that the real Santa?"

The Church Year is like a parade with its many major feasts paced between an assortment of days dedicated to various canonized saints. The end of the year, like the end of the parade, is carefully selected to make a major point. It is always the feast of Christ the King, a feast created not that long ago when nations liked to "parade" their kings. The Church responded with a royal feast of its own.

Today's gospel, however, places before us an image of Christ that stands in sharp contrast to various depictions of earthly kings. He is not clothed in richness and power, but as one hanging on a throne of torture. We know that image of Jesus. Some call it "a sign of contradiction" and surely it is. The Creator of the universe is placed into the role of a criminal, a despised victim of human narrowness and fear. Yet, we Christians look at the crucifix and boldly say, "This is our king." He is our Lord and Redeemer and he is never more himself than when he found himself hanging from the cross. Most, but not all his followers ran away to hide. His mother and only one disciple stayed with him. We might ask ourselves with some justification, who wants a king like this?

Pope Francis often speaks about the crucifixion of Jesus. Here is a sampling of what he said in a homily on Palm Sunday during the first year he was made pope. "Jesus on the cross feels the whole weight of the evil (of the world), and with the force of God's love, he conquers it. He defeats it with his resurrection. This is the good that Jesus does for us on the throne of the cross. Christ's cross embraced with love never leads to sadness, but to joy, the joy of having been saved and of doing a little bit of what he did on the day of his death."

Our king, Jesus Christ, gave and continues to give his all for us. His love and mercy are without limit. No other king even came close to his boundless love. Give thanks for his great love and try to be like Jesus in our own small part of the world.

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