



Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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Zachaeus and Repentance February 2, 2025

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Today we have arrived at the last Sunday in so-called "Ordinary Time." When we hear the story of Zaccheus we know that the week following begins the three-week period of time immediately prior to the beginning of Great Lent. Next week we hear the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, the week following the Parable of the Prodigal Son and the week following that the Parable of the Great Judgment. Then it is Forgiveness Sunday and the beginning of the Great Fast.

Each of these weeks focusses on one or more aspects of the message we heard in last week's Gospel which tells the story of the beginning of our Lord's Incarnational earthly ministry. He is baptized, to sanctify the waters of creation, waters that in their purification flow throughout the world and bring blessing to everyone in every place; He is tempted in the wilderness by Satan, and is able to overcome the temptations with a mere Word each time; and then He begins preaching with the simple message, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" Fr. Anthony reminded us last week that repentance is not mere sorrow for our sins, nor it is a

prerequisite for what God give freely: the Grace of Himself and forgiveness. Repentance is turning away from whatever sin or sins have held us in their enslavement. It is moving in a new direction, it is putting on the new mind to turn away from our sin toward the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the Reign of God in our hearts.

St. Luke sums up the life of Zacchaeus in only a few words. He says that "he was a tax collector and rich," two phrases that indicate clearly that Zacchaeus in his life had been concerned in his life with only one thing, and one thing alone: his own selfish wellbeing, even though his efforts to achieve whatever selfish goals he had might hurt others. But apparently Zacchaeus had come into contact with Jesus earlier. Perhaps he saw Jesus heal, or reach out to those who would on the outside of popular religious acceptability, or perhaps he saw Jesus raise the dead. Maybe he heard about such things and came to a realization that something was missing in his life, indeed, the most important thing was missing, that he could not come to fulfillment or satisfaction by looking out for himself alone. So he climbs the Sycamore tree to get a look as Jesus passes by on his way to Jerico, the most ancient of ancient cities on the face of the earth. Jesus spots him and immediately calls him down, inviting Himself to go to Zacchaeus' house. On the face of it, Jesus steps out of bounds of acceptable behavior, for a Rabbi of that time and place would never have done so; for Zacchaeus, remember, was a tax collector and rich, two impediments for the Reign of God in his heart.

But Zacchaeus expresses what Jesus already knew, that he had repented, and that the ramification or sign of that repentance was to make amends to those whom he had harmed by his self-seeking preoccupation with himself. "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."

Repentance, you see, does not merely mean sorry or setting out in a new direction. It also means making amends. This is sometimes difficult, and in many situations virtually impossible. In those programs that we call the 12-step programs for people seeking freedom from their various addictions, making amends are steps 8 and 9. Seek to make amends to those whom you have harmed, but only when doing so will not harm them further.

This is good advice, advice that Zacchaeus illustrates and that we should follow ourselves. If we have hurt others in our selfish behavior, we must seek to be reconciled, not for our sake, but for theirs. If possible, we seek to forgive and to receive forgiveness; if not, we keep their names in our hearts and pray for them every day. We pay back what we have taken from them, obviously material things like money or objects, but if this is not possible without hurting them further, or if it not possible for other reasons, once again, we pray in our repentance for them with compassion and sincerity.

This year, why not make the welfare of others your prime Lenten Fast priority? Make a list of Christian (first) names only of people you know you have hurt. Seek reconciliation, but where it is not possible, make their names as you remember them and add them to that list the main object of your prayers. This spiritual discipline will be a true sign of your repentance. When Lent leads into Holy Week, remove your own name from ownership of that list, but bring the list in

to church where I will place it on the altar for the duration of Holy Mysteries that lead up to Pascha. Like Zacchaeus, you too will do what you can for those whom you have offended or harmed; and like Zacchaeus, you too will live that wonderful proclamation of the Lord: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the Lost!"

To Him be all honor and glory forever! AMEN!

Fr. Elias

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