

SUNDAY PLUS

Raise them up!

On the threshold of forgiveness

by Fr Paul Douthwaite

In today's Gospel, Jesus identifies, in the person of Zacchaeus, a sinner who is perched on the threshold of seeking forgiveness and calmly opens for him the door to salvation.

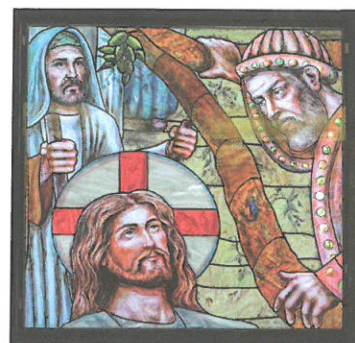
The Israel of Jesus' time contained a complex mix of Jewish fervour and Roman occupation which presented opportunities for people who were inclined to give into wrongdoing. Zacchaeus,

although he was a Jew, a son of Abraham, was weak; his greed had got the better of him and, as a tax collector, he was working for the Roman authorities. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors because they used their unregulated Roman position to excessively tax their fellow Jews and, in so doing, to build up their own wealth.

Jesus' reputation as a preacher and teacher was growing. Zacchaeus, who was both short in stature and in morals, climbed a huge sycamore tree to overcome

his flaws: his physical shortness which prevented him from seeing the person of Jesus and his moral ineptness as he came in plain sight of the source of his salvation.

By inviting himself into the home of Zacchaeus, Jesus empowers him to name his wrongdoing and also the restitution that would enable him to receive forgiveness. Jesus affords him the opportunity to cross the threshold, to seek forgiveness, to receive salvation and in so doing to once again be accepted as a son of Abraham.



The Gospel challenges us to recognise how we succumb to sin in our complex world and to recognise that, in and through the person of Jesus, we are enabled to cross the threshold and to enter the door of forgiveness which leads to salvation.

Fr Paul Douthwaite is the National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons, HMPPS/ NOMS Catholic Faith Adviser for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Image / Jesus and the tax collector Zacchaeus. Stig Alenas / Shutterstock.com

The power of unconditional love

by Sr Thérèse Garman SMP

Zacchaeus is not just physically vertically challenged but also in moral and social standing, constantly seeking a superior position at the expense of others' well-being. Underneath, he is very unhappy.

He doesn't express sorrow, but Jesus looks at him without condemnation, only offering an invitation. This meeting changed his life. The crowd sees only Zacchaeus' outer self; but Jesus sees the heart. Christian mission isn't just feeding the hungry; it's also helping the rich and powerful to satisfy their spiritual hunger.

Jesus doesn't require us to change our life before he will come; he comes to us now, as we are. He knew Zacchaeus would never find what he

was looking for until he changed his lifestyle, but condemnation wouldn't make that happen. What changed him was God's unconditional love. Zacchaeus had been seeking recognition in all the wrong places and the consequences caused suffering to others.

The response of the crowd was angry condemnation. Where do we find ourselves here? Is our love unconditional?

Sr Thérèse Garman is a Sister of Our Lady of Providence.

Loving Lord, look into my wounded heart and heal it. Transform my life and make me whole. Come into the hearts of the people whom I know and love. Amen.

Unexpected guest?

by James Gallogly

The rather comical character of Zacchaeus was easily dismissed by his peers. Jesus however, saw goodness and potential. Do we see that goodness and potential when we look at each other? Do we readily see a stranger as a "tabernacle of the Holy Spirit"? On a very good day, maybe?

My challenge as a prison chaplain is to see the men as Jesus saw Zacchaeus; the courts have made their judgement.

Jesus challenged Zacchaeus about how to live his life by simply showing him love.

The phrase "tough love" is not a new one. I believe it indicates a desire never to give up on the sinner, no matter what. It might

take a lot of listening and many falls along the way, but there is a recognition of hope.

Sin is not condoned: it is lovingly challenged all the way to salvation.

James Gallogly is a lay Catholic prison chaplain in a UK prison.

"Jesus... always opens, always opens new spaces of life; he does not stop at appearances, but looks at the heart. And here he sees this man's wounded heart: wounded by the sin of greed, by the many terrible things that Zacchaeus had done. He sees that wounded heart and goes there."

Pope Francis

Today:
Wisdom 11:22 – 12:2
2 Thessalonians 1:11 – 2:2
Luke 19:1-10

Monday:
Romans 11:29-36
Luke 14:12-14

Tuesday:
Romans 12:5-16
Luke 14:15-24

Wednesday:
Romans 13:8-10
Luke 14:25-33

Thursday:
Romans 14:7-12
Luke 15:1-10

Friday:
Romans 15:14-21
Luke 16:1-8

Saturday:
Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12
1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17
John 2:13-22

Next Sunday:
2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14
2 Thessalonians 2:16 – 3:5
Luke 20:27-38