

### Reflections for this Weekend

Today’s Gospel reveals the mystery of how God enters history not by force, but through obedience, discernment, and light quietly breaking into darkness. Jesus begins His public ministry not with spectacle, but with a deliberate movement shaped by suffering, danger, and fidelity to the Father’s will. Hearing of John’s imprisonment, He withdraws to Galilee.

This is not fear-driven escape, but holy discernment. The Son of God respects the rhythms of divine timing. He teaches us that faithfulness is not reckless heroism, but listening to God and allowing the mission to unfold according to grace rather than impulse.

In this moment we see a profound truth: God’s work often advances not through confrontation, but through quiet relocation, through obedience hidden from applause. In our own lives, there are times when stepping back, remaining silent, or changing direction is not weakness but wisdom. The Gospel invites us to trust that even apparent delays or detours can become sacred ground where God prepares something new.

By settling in Galilee, Jesus fulfills Isaiah’s ancient prophecy: *“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.”* This light does not shine from Jerusalem’s religious center or Rome’s political power, but from the margins from a region marked by poverty, cultural mixture, and neglect. God chooses precisely those places where hope seems thinnest.

The Incarnate Word enters darkness not as an idea, but as a living presence, walking among ordinary people, sanctifying daily life.

Today, Galilee is wherever people feel forgotten: homes burdened by anxiety, hearts weighed down by sin, communities fractured by violence, war, injustice, or indifference. Christ does not wait for perfect conditions. He comes to us as we are. The light of the Kingdom shines not because darkness disappears, but because God is present within it. This challenges us to become bearers of that same light, through mercy, patience, courage, and truth, especially where it is least welcomed.

Jesus’ first proclamation, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,”* is not a threat but an invitation. Repentance is not merely sorrow for past sins; it is a profound interior turning, a change of vision, desire, and direction. To repent is to allow God to reorder our lives, to loosen our grip on habits that enslave us, and to realign our hearts with His reign of love. The Kingdom is not postponed to the future; it stands at our door, asking to be received today.

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In practical terms, this Gospel calls us to ask: Where am I still living in darkness, fear, resentment, complacency, or distraction? What must I turn away from so that the light of Christ can take deeper root in me? Repentance becomes real when it leads to concrete choices: reconciliation instead of division, prayer instead of noise, generosity instead of self-protection, truth instead of convenience.

Matthew 4:12–17 teaches us that God’s Kingdom begins quietly, in fragile moments, among vulnerable people. It begins when we allow Christ to meet us in our Galilee, to shine His light into our shadows, and to transform our ordinary lives into places of grace.

This gospel is both comfort and challenge: comfort, because God comes close to us in our darkness; challenge, because His nearness demands a response.

To follow Christ is to walk toward the light, even when the path is uncertain, trusting that where He is present, the Kingdom is already at work.

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## A Holy Reminder

God answers prayers, just not always with *express delivery*.

Coming to church doesn’t make us perfect, but it does make us *available*.

If the Gospel steps on your toes, don’t worry, it’s aiming for your heart.

We bound in church to remind ourselves that God is taller than our problems.

The pew is not a parking spot for saints, but a waiting room for sinners.

If you feel distracted at prayer, congratulations, you’re human, not broken.

God listens even when our prayers sound like complaints.

The choir sings to praise God; we sing to prove we need mercy.

Coffee after Liturgy is holy, because fellowship needs caffeine.

The collection basket is not a bill, but a **thank-you note** to God.

We don’t come to church because we’re good,

we come because God is.

If faith were easy, it wouldn’t need grace.

Smile, God already knows your weaknesses.

And He still invites you back next Sunday.

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**“Do not be amazed that you fall every day; do not give up.**

**Stand your ground courageously, and the angel who guards you will honor your patience.**

**For it is not the one who never falls who is crowned, but the one who rises again with humility.”**

**St. John Climacus**

## The Human Nature of Jesus and Our Human Nature: Similar, Yet Not the Same

Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human. He took our human nature fully, He was born, He grew, He felt hunger and fatigue, He wept, He suffered, and He died. In this way, nothing that belongs to authentic humanity is foreign to Him.

Yet there is one profound difference between **His human nature and ours**.

We are **inclined toward sin**. From the moment of our birth, our human nature is wounded. This wound is not simply that we commit sins, but that our desires are often disordered. We know the good, yet we struggle to choose it. Our hearts are divided. Saint Paul expresses this struggle when he says: ***“I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want”*** (Romans 7:19). This inner tension belongs to our fallen condition.

Jesus, however, is **not inclined toward sin**.

Although He assumed human nature, He did not assume a **fallen** human nature. His humanity is exactly as God intended it to be before sin entered the world. His will is fully human, yet always perfectly aligned with the will of the Father. In Him, there is no inner rebellion, no disorder, no attraction to evil.

Jesus could be **tempted**, but temptation in Him comes **from outside**, not from within. The Gospel shows this clearly in the desert. Satan approaches Him, but finds nothing inside Jesus that responds to the temptation. In us, temptation often awakens something already wounded. In Christ, temptation meets only holiness and freedom.

This difference does not distance Jesus from us, it actually makes Him our **healer**.

If Jesus were inclined to sin like us, He could sympathize with our weakness, but He could not save us from it. Because His humanity is unbroken, He becomes the **new Adam**, the beginning of a restored humanity. What we lost through disobedience, He restores through obedience.

Our human nature is healed not by our own effort, but by **union with His**. Through baptism, the sacraments, prayer, and repentance, His sinless humanity slowly reshapes ours. He does not shame us for our weakness; He enters it in order to transform it.

In Christ, we see not only who God is, but who **we are called to become**: fully human, fully alive, and fully free to love without sin.

## Hearing the Kingdom Without Being Changed

We hear the announcement of the Kingdom of Heaven again and again. It is proclaimed in the Gospel, sung in the liturgy, explained in homilies, and repeated in our prayers. We listen, we reflect, we even admire its beauty. Yet too often, after all the hearing and processing, nothing truly changes. The Kingdom remains an idea rather than a reality shaping our life.

This is one of the great spiritual tragedies of religious familiarity: we are informed but not transformed.

The Gospel never presents the Kingdom as information to be understood, but as a presence that reorders existence. When Jesus announces, ***The Kingdom of God is at hand,*** He does not mean that it is nearby in space, but that it is standing before us in His own person. The Kingdom arrives where Christ is received, not merely where He is discussed.

Zacchaeus did not receive a lecture. He received a visit.

He climbed the tree not because he understood the Kingdom, but because something in him was restless enough to seek. He did not analyze Jesus; he desired to see Him. And when Jesus stopped, looked up, and called him by name, Zacchaeus was no longer an observer. He was exposed, seen, and personally addressed. The Kingdom entered his house not through explanation, but through encounter.

This is where many of us stop short.

We hear the call, but we keep Jesus at a safe distance. We allow His words into our mind, but not into the places where our attachments live. Transformation requires not only attention, but availability, a surrender of the self that prefers control over conversion.

Zacchaeus is a revelation of grace. He does not purify himself before Jesus comes; Jesus comes precisely because he is unclean. Grace precedes repentance.

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Yet grace also demands a response. The presence of Christ awakens freedom, and freedom must choose. Zacchaeus does not negotiate; he responds immediately and concretely. Half of his goods are given away. Restitution is made. The interior encounter becomes an exterior reordering of life. Salvation, Jesus declares, has entered not merely Zacchaeus' heart, but his house his entire way of living.

Morally, this is where we often resist. We want consolation without cost, forgiveness without reparation, mercy without the dismantling of unjust structures in our own lives. We spiritualize the Kingdom to avoid its moral demands. Zacchaeus shows us that true repentance is not emotional regret but restored justice. The Kingdom always touches money, power, relationships, and the way we treat others. If it does not, it has not yet taken flesh.

The Church gives us the same moment of encounter that Zacchaeus experienced. Christ passes through our midst in the Divine Liturgy, in the proclamation of the Gospel, in the Eucharist. He calls us by name. Yet it is possible to attend the liturgy and remain in the tree watching from above, protected by habit and distance. The liturgy does not transform us automatically. It transforms us only when we allow Christ to enter our house when worship becomes communion rather than ritual, and when the Eucharist extends beyond the altar into daily life.

The dismissal sends us where Zacchaeus went: back into the world, but no longer the same.

Zacchaeus is a man defined by his social identity. He is labeled a sinner, a collaborator, a traitor. Society has already decided who he is. Yet Jesus refuses to let the crowd have the final word. The Kingdom restores persons beyond social reduction. Zacchaeus is no longer merely a tax collector; he becomes a son of Abraham. True transformation always challenges social narratives both the ones that condemn and the ones that excuse. A converted person inevitably unsettles

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the community, because their new way of living exposes the possibility of change for everyone.

What do we need, then, to be like Zacchaeus?

We need the humility to climb the tree to admit that we cannot see unless we rise above our routines and self-justifications. We need the courage to let Christ stop us, name us, and enter the places we guard most carefully. We need the freedom to respond not with words, but with decisions that reorder our lives. And we need the patience to let this encounter continue to unfold, day after day, until the Kingdom is no longer something we hear about, but something visible in how we live.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not lacking power. What is often lacking is our consent to be changed.

When that consent is finally given, salvation does not remain in the Gospel text. It stands at our door and says, ***“Today I must stay at your house.”***

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## **From the Pastor’s desk**

If any of you would like to receive a letter certifying the total amount you contributed to our church during the year **2025** for income tax purposes, please let me know. I will be happy to send it to you by mail or provide a copy in person.

Our **2025 financial books were closed on December 31**, and all records are carefully maintained using **QuickBooks**, making the report easily and accurately available.

Thank you from my heart for your generosity, your trust, and your continued support of our parish. May God bless you abundantly for all that you do for His Church.

With gratitude and prayers,

**Fr. Hugo**

**Ukrainian Catholic Parish****Pastor****Very Rev. Hugo Soutus****Address:****3720 West Maryland Ave.****Phoenix, AZ. 85019****Rectory: (602) 973-3667****Parish: (602) 347-9267****Emergency:****602-329-3281****E-mail:****DMofGod@cox.net****Website:****[www.Ukrainianchurch.org](http://www.Ukrainianchurch.org)****Sunday Divine Liturgy:****8:50 a.m.** The Third Hour

And

Prayer Service for Peace in Ukraine.

**9:30a.m.** Divine Liturgy**Religious Education**

September - May

**Sacraments Penance:**

Sunday before Liturgies or by appointment

**Baptism - Matrimony**

In most instances six-month membership required

**Funerals**

Membership of an immediate family member required

**Communion to the Homebound**

If you or your family members are confined to a health center or are homebound, please contact Fr. Hugo directly so that arrangements can be made for his visitation.

**Sunday, January 11****“Sunday after Theophany”****“Venerable Father Theodosius****Epistle:** Ephesians 4:7-13. **Gospel:** Matthew 4:12-17.

8:50 a.m. The Third Hour and Prayer Service for Peace in Ukraine

9:30 a.m. Gods blessings and good health for all our parishioners and friends

**Monday, January 12****“The Holy Martyr Tatiana”****Epistle:** James 2:14-26. **Gospel:** Mark 10:46-52.**Tuesday, January 13****“The Holy Martyrs Hermylus and Stratonicus”****Epistle:** James 3:1-10 **Gospel:** Mark 11:11-23.**6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom****Wednesday, January 14****“Our Venerable Fathers Massacred in Sinai and Raithu”****Epistle:** James 3:11-4:6. **Gospel:** Mark 11:23-26.**Thursday, January 15****“Our Venerable Fathers Paul of Thebes”****Epistle:** James 4:7-5:9 **Gospel:** Mark 11:27-33.**6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom****Friday, January 16****“The Veneration of the Precious Chains of the Apostle Peter”****Epistle:** 1 Peter 1:1-2; 10-12; 2:6-10. **Gospel:** Mark 12:1-12.**Saturday, January 17****“Our Venerable and God-bearing Father Anthony the Great”****Epistle:** Hebrews 13:17-21. **Gospel:** Luke 6:17-23.**6:30 p.m. Evening prayers via Zoom****Sunday, January 18****“Sunday of Zachaeus”****“Our Holy Fathers of Alexandria Athanasius”****Epistle:** 1 Timothy 4:9-15. **Gospel:** Luke 19:1-10.

8:50 a.m. The Third Hour and Prayer Service for Peace in Ukraine

9:30 a.m. Gods blessings and good health for all our parishioners and friends

With grateful hearts, we thank you for your generous financial support of our church. May the Lord, who sees your kindness and sacrifice, bless you a hundredfold and reward your generosity with His peace, protection, and abundant grace.