

### Reflections for this Weekend

Today’s Gospel is not merely the story of a man who climbed a tree; it is the revelation of how salvation begins when desire dares to rise above fear, shame, and habit. Zacchaeus is small in stature, but more importantly, he has become small in spirit compressed by wealth, isolated by sin, and rejected by the judgment of others. He is surrounded by a crowd, yet profoundly alone. This is the hidden tragedy of sin: it promises fullness but shrinks the heart, it accumulates possessions but empties communion.

Zacchaeus runs ahead and climbs a sycamore tree. This single gesture already contains conversion. A dignified, powerful man abandons his status, his image, his control.

He becomes ridiculous in the eyes of the world. True conversion always begins with a holy loss of dignity. To encounter Christ, we must be willing to be seen as foolish, to admit that our usual ways of standing tall are no longer enough. The tree becomes a place of humility, and humility becomes the ladder to grace.

Jesus does not wait to be invited. He stops, looks up, and calls Zacchaeus by name. This is the Gospel in one sentence: God sees us where we have hidden ourselves and speaks our name with love. Before Zacchaeus repents, before he promises restitution, before he changes his life, Jesus already desires his presence. Grace precedes morality. Love comes before reform. Salvation is not a reward for the good but a gift that awakens goodness.

“Come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” Jesus does not say, “Change first,” but “Come down.” Conversion is not about climbing higher but about coming down into reality, into truth, into the vulnerability of hospitality. To welcome Christ is to open the door of the house we have carefully arranged, including the rooms we would rather keep locked.

Zacchaeus welcomes Him with joy, and joy is the sure sign that grace is already at work.

Fear-driven religion produces anxiety; grace-filled faith produces joy, even when it demands change.

The crowd murmurs. They always do. They see Zacchaeus only as he was, not as he is becoming. This is another obstacle to conversion: the voices that imprison us in our past. Yet Zacchaeus does not argue with the crowd. He stands before Jesus. True repentance does not negotiate with public opinion; it responds to divine mercy. His promise to give half his goods to the poor and restore fourfold what he has stolen is not a calculation but an overflow.

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When Christ enters the heart, generosity is no longer forced; it becomes spontaneous.

What we cling to loses its power when Love takes residence.

Jesus proclaims, “Today salvation has come to this house.” Salvation is not postponed to the future; it is experienced today, in concrete decisions, in reordered priorities, in restored relationships. The house is saved because the heart has been visited. Zacchaeus is called a “son of Abraham” not because of his ancestry but because faith has been reborn in him. Faith is not proven by words but by movement by coming down, by opening the door, by changing how we live.

This Gospel confronts us with a quiet but piercing question: where are we hiding from Jesus? Perhaps in busyness, respectability, routine, or even religious habit. Like Zacchaeus, we may want to see Jesus without being seen by Him. Yet salvation begins the moment we allow His gaze to reach us and His voice to interrupt our plans. Practically, this means creating space for Christ to enter our daily life not as a visitor, but as a guest who stays. It means concrete acts of justice, generosity, and reconciliation that flow from an encountered mercy. It means letting go of what defines us falsely so we can receive who we truly are.

The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. Not what was evil, not what was condemned, but what was lost. Zacchaeus was never beyond reach; he was simply misplaced. And so are we. The Gospel assures us that no height of avoidance, no depth of sin, no weight of reputation can prevent Christ from stopping, looking up, and saying our name today.

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### ***From the Pastor's desk!!!***

Just a kind reminder that if you need a church letter stating the amount of your 2025 yearly donation for tax purposes, please let me know. I will be happy to send it to you by mail, or you are welcome to pick it up at your convenience. Preparing the report takes me less than a minute.

Please also note that the parish financial statement is available to parishioners who are active in the life of the parish.

Thank you for your continued support and generosity.

***“Where generosity becomes worship, the heart learns to trust God more than possessions.”***

## The Courage to Answer Mercy

True repentance begins where the need to be seen ends. It is born in the interior place where the soul finally grows tired of performing and allows itself to be known by God.

In an age shaped by visibility, approval, and constant comparison, repentance feels almost unnatural because it refuses to negotiate with image or public opinion. It does not ask how this change will be perceived, whether it will be admired, or if it will cost acceptance.

It asks only one question: *What does mercy ask of me now?* And once that question is answered, repentance moves forward without calculation.

For the man and woman of this time, repentance is often misunderstood as weakness or regression. In truth, it is an act of spiritual maturity. It is the moment when a person stops dividing life into public and private truths and allows integrity to reunite what fear has separated. Repentance is not driven by guilt alone, because guilt can still be self-centered. It is driven by encounter by the quiet realization that one has been loved without conditions and therefore can no longer live divided. Divine mercy does not shame; it awakens. It gently but firmly calls the heart out of half-measures and spiritual compromises.

This is why true repentance does not argue or defend itself. When mercy is recognized, excuses lose their power. The need to explain, justify, or blame slowly dissolves. The heart becomes simple again. A man learns that strength is not measured by how well he protects his image, but by how honestly he allows grace to reorder his life. A woman learns that dignity is not diminished by surrender, but revealed through it. Both discover that repentance does not erase personality or freedom; it purifies them so they can finally serve love rather than fear.

Repentance always moves from the interior to the concrete. It reshapes priorities, relationships, and habits. It touches how one handles money, authority, sexuality, words, and time. It is not content with private remorse while public life remains untouched. Yet it is never harsh or violent. Mercy works patiently, teaching the soul to release what once seemed necessary for survival. What is surrendered is not taken away; it is replaced with something more truthful. This is why repentance brings peace even when it demands sacrifice. The soul recognizes that nothing essential is being lost.

Divine mercy does not ask permission from culture. It speaks quietly but with authority, inviting the heart to align itself with eternal truth rather than temporary consensus.

Those who respond may feel exposed, misunderstood, or even judged by others, but inwardly they experience a new freedom. Repentance teaches the soul to live from God's gaze rather than from the shifting opinions of the world. Over time, this gaze becomes the place of rest, where identity is no longer threatened by disagreement or rejection.

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True repentance also heals memory. It does not trap the soul in the past but redeems it. What once caused shame becomes a place of compassion for others. What once produced hardness becomes a source of humility. The repented heart no longer looks down on anyone, because it knows how deeply it has been met by mercy. This humility is not self-contempt; it is clarity. It sees life as gift rather than achievement.

In a world that teaches endless self-construction, repentance allows God to reconstruct the heart from within. It accepts that the soul was never meant to save itself. This surrender does not make a person passive; it makes them responsive. Life becomes a dialogue rather than a project. Prayer becomes honest. Relationships become more patient. Choices become slower but truer.

In the end, true repentance is not a single moment but a way of standing before life. It is the decision to respond to divine mercy again and again, without conditions, without delay, and without consulting public opinion. It is love recognizing love and allowing itself to be transformed by it. And from that hidden place, a new way of living quietly emerges one that may not impress the world, but that reflects the unmistakable freedom of a heart reconciled with God.

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What a blessing it is to look back on the Arizona Ukrainian Festival and say with full hearts: ***it was worth it.*** This beautiful success did not happen by chance. It was born from countless hours of planning, preparing, lifting, cooking, organizing, worrying, adjusting, and starting again. It was built by hands that grew tired, by feet that kept moving, and by hearts that refused to give up, even when patience was tested and a few tears quietly appeared along the way.

Yes, there were moments when the coffee was not strong enough, the to-do list was too long, and someone wondered, ***“Why did I volunteer again?”*** And yet, every challenge became part of the joy. Those tears, whether from exhaustion, emotion, or a missing spoon at the worst possible moment, only proved how deeply everyone cared. If there were no tears, it would mean there was no love. And this festival was full of love.

Because of you, our culture was honored, our faith was visible, our traditions were alive, and our community shined. You welcomed strangers like family, worked behind the scenes without recognition, and carried the festival not only on your shoulders but in your hearts. What people saw as music, food, and celebration was, in truth, the fruit of sacrifice, teamwork, and generosity.

Thank you for your humor when things went wrong, your smiles when you were exhausted, and your positive spirit that carried everyone forward. You reminded us that when we work together, even hard work becomes a blessing and sometimes even fun. May God reward you a hundredfold for what you gave so freely, and may this shared joy remain long after the tents are folded and the dishes are finally washed.

With deep gratitude, pride, and a joyful heart: **thank you!!!!!!** from Fr. Hugo

