

9. November 2023

Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica
Today salvation has come to this house

Lk 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "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." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

Just when we think we have understood Jesus in our human categories, He surprises us again. In this Gospel passage, read at the traditional Mass for the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, we see Him staying at the house of the tax collector Zacchaeus, which probably no one would have expected. As a tax collector, he was certainly unpopular with the people and the religious authorities of the Jews.

We too can be tempted to think of the poor as God's favourites and beloved, while the rich are not entitled to such preference. But this way of thinking is wrong. However true it may be that the poor need special attention, the Lord always looks at the heart of each person. In the case of Zacchaeus, He found an open heart to enter. In fact, we hear from Zacchaeus himself that from now on he would strive to act justly.

This Gospel therefore invites us to get to know Jesus better through His words and deeds, and not to try to classify Him according to our human criteria.

With His last sentence, the Lord makes us see His deepest intention: "*The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost*". Therefore, the encounter with Jesus does not depend so much on whether a person is poor or rich, nor on the social position he or she occupies. The Lord wants to offer to each person the salvation He came to bring to all humanity.

This is the constant concern of the Son of God: to tell people about the love of His Father and to free them from error and sin. It is we who often make distinctions between people, forgetting that each person is loved by God and that the Lord's first concern is their eternal salvation.

Jesus looks at little Zacchaeus, who had climbed up the tree to see Him go by, and who must have had to endure some mocking looks from other people, and says to him: *"Zacchae'us, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today"*.

The murmuring of those present indicates that they did not understand the Lord and were even scandalised by what He was doing. But if they had listened to Him and not closed their hearts to Him, they would have understood that the Lord wanted to offer salvation to little Zacchaeus and his whole household. His wealth and social position did not exclude him from God's love. That is why Jesus stayed with him.

This Gospel passage can serve as a lesson for us to learn to look at people with the eyes of Jesus, to adopt His loving gaze, which is directed at everyone without exception, and to work like Him for the salvation of all.