

AUGUST 2025 PRAYER SERVICE

The Prayer Service for August is taken from the ERI College in Lyon, France, "Today, I must stay at your house." (Luke 19:1-10)

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The passage from **Luke 19:1-10** recounts the story of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus in Jericho. This episode highlights themes of salvation, mercy, and Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost.

The Encounter with Zacchaeus

As Jesus was passing through Jericho, a wealthy chief tax collector named Zacchaeus sought to see Him. Being short, Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to get a view of Jesus. When Jesus reached that spot, He looked up, called Zacchaeus by name, and declared, ***"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."***

This invitation surprised Zacchaeus, who joyfully welcomed Jesus into his home. However, the crowd grumbled, saying that Jesus had gone to be the guest of a sinner. Tax collectors like Zacchaeus were often despised for their corrupt practices, as they would collect taxes for the Roman invaders and usually enrich themselves at the expense of others.

Zacchaeus' Transformation and Jesus' Declaration

In response to Jesus' presence, Zacchaeus stood and declared to the Lord, ***"Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."*** This act demonstrated a profound change of heart, moving from a life of potential exploitation to one of justice and charity.

Jesus responded to Zacchaeus' declaration by saying, ***"Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."***

Theological Significance

This narrative underscores several key aspects of Jesus' ministry:

- **Mercy and Forgiveness:** Jesus' gaze upon Zacchaeus was not one of reproach but of mercy, offering forgiveness to someone considered a public sinner. Jesus' willingness to dine with tax collectors and sinners, despite criticism from religious leaders, demonstrated His view of a community from which no one is excluded.
- **Seeking the Lost:** The story exemplifies Jesus' mission "to seek out and to save the lost." Zacchaeus, who felt lost and despised, was actively sought out by the Lord.
- **Transformation and Repentance:** Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus led to a radical conversion, evidenced by his commitment to restitution and charity. This transformation highlights that God's mercy precedes and enables human repentance.
- **Divine Initiative:** The encounter was not by chance; Jesus intentionally sought out Zacchaeus, demonstrating that God's mercy often precedes and attracts individuals, leading to their change of heart.

TIME FOR SCRIPTURE:

Luke 19:1-10 - Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

He came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

A TIME OF SILENT MEDITATION:

SHARED PRAYER ON SCRIPTURAL TEXT:

The intent is reflection in the form of a prayer, not discussion.

PRAYER INTENTIONS:

- Pass card or cross, so people can pass gracefully and the team knows when the prayer is complete.
- The team should respond at the end of each person's turn, for example, "Lord, hear our prayer".

LITURGICAL PRAYER:

Luke 19:1-10, the account of Zacchaeus, highlights themes of God's mercy, the seeking and saving of the lost, and the transformative power of repentance. Several Psalms beautifully complement these themes, particularly those that speak of God's forgiveness, steadfast love, and the joy of salvation.

Psalm 103: *God's Abundant Mercy and Forgiveness*

Psalm 103 is an excellent complement to the story of Zacchaeus, as it is a hymn of praise for God's merciful and forgiving nature.

Forgiveness of Iniquity: The psalm begins by blessing the Lord and remembering "all his benefits—who forgives all your iniquity." This directly resonates with Zacchaeus' experience, as Jesus' presence brought salvation and forgiveness to his house, despite his past sins as a tax collector.

God's Compassion and Steadfast Love: Psalm 103 describes God as **"merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."** It emphasizes that God **"does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities."** This boundless mercy is precisely what Zacchaeus encountered, as Jesus, instead of condemning him, chose to enter his home. The psalm further states, **"as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us."** This imagery powerfully conveys the completeness of God's forgiveness, mirroring the radical transformation and acceptance Zacchaeus received.

God's Knowledge of Human Frailty: The psalm acknowledges God's understanding of human weakness: **"For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust."** This divine

compassion for human frailty is evident in Jesus' approach to Zacchaeus, recognizing his need for salvation despite his societal standing as a sinner.

Psalm 32: The Joy of Forgiveness and Confession

Psalm 32 also strongly complements the Zacchaeus narrative, focusing on the blessedness of forgiveness and the relief that comes from confessing sin.

- **Happiness of the Forgiven:** The psalm opens with ***"Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."*** This "happiness" or blessedness perfectly describes Zacchaeus' joyful reception of Jesus and the salvation that came to his house.
- **Confession and Forgiveness:** The psalmist recounts, ***"While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long... Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin."*** Zacchaeus' public declaration of repentance and restitution ("Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much") is a clear act of confession and a response to the forgiveness he received. Saint Jerome, in his ***Letter 122 to Rusticus***, highlights this psalm, noting that upon confession, God forgives the iniquity of sin.
- **God as a Hiding Place:** The psalm describes God as a **"hiding place"** who preserves from trouble and surrounds with **"glad cries of deliverance."** This reflects Jesus' role in Zacchaeus' life, offering him refuge and deliverance from his sinful past and the condemnation of the crowd.

Psalm 51: A Prayer for a Clean Heart and Renewal

Psalm 51, the ***Miserere***, is another fitting psalm, as it is a profound prayer of repentance and a plea for a clean heart and renewed spirit.

- **Plea for Mercy and Cleansing:** The psalm begins with "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." This echoes the deep need for purification that Zacchaeus, as a sinner, would have felt, and which Jesus' presence fulfilled.
- **Desire for a New Heart:** The prayer ***"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me"*** speaks to the internal transformation that Zacchaeus experienced, leading to his outward acts of charity and restitution. **Pope Saint John Paul II** emphasized that this psalm reveals a "lively sense of the possibility of conversion" and that God can transform the sinner into a **"new creature."**
- **Sacrifice of a Contrite Heart:** The psalm states, ***"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."*** Zacchaeus' sincere repentance and willingness to make amends demonstrate this **"broken and contrite heart,"** which was pleasing to God and brought salvation to his home.

Psalm 85: Restoration and Steadfast Love

Psalm 85 also offers a complementary perspective, focusing on God's restoration and the meeting of steadfast love and faithfulness.

- **Forgiveness and Restoration:** *"Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin."* This theme of God forgiving sin and restoring fortunes aligns with Jesus bringing salvation and a new beginning to Zacchaeus' life and household.
- **Steadfast Love and Peace:** The psalm speaks of *"Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other."* This imagery beautifully captures the reconciliation and peace that Zacchaeus found through his encounter with Jesus, where God's love met his repentance, leading to righteousness and peace in his life.

In conclusion, **Psalms 103, 32, 51, and 85** all provide rich theological and emotional parallels to the story of **Zacchaeus**, emphasizing **God's boundless mercy, the joy of forgiveness, the necessity of a contrite heart, and the transformative power of divine love that seeks out and saves the lost.**

Psalm 103:1-13

Response: Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name!

*Bless the LORD, my soul; and do not forget all his gifts,
Who pardons all your sins, and heals all your ills,*

Response: Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name!

*Who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with mercy and compassion,
Who fills your days with good things, so your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Response: Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name!

*The LORD does righteous deeds, brings justice to all the oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses, to the Israelites his deeds.*

Response: Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name!

*Merciful and gracious is the LORD, slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
He will not always accuse, and nurses no lasting anger;*

Response: Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name!

*He has not dealt with us as our sins merit, nor requited us as our wrongs deserve.
For as the heavens tower over the earth, so his mercy towers over those who fear him.*

Response: Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name!

*As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us.
As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.*

Response: Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name!

*For he knows how we are formed, remembers that we are dust.
As for man, his days are like the grass; he blossoms like a flower in the field.*

Response: Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless his holy name!

CONCLUSION OF PRAYER TIME:

ALL:

O Merciful God, we come before You with hearts open to Your divine grace, reflecting on the profound encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. We recall how Zacchaeus, a man burdened by his past, eagerly sought to see Your Son, and how Jesus, in His boundless love, called him by name, declaring, "Today I must stay at your house!". This act of Your Son reveals Your desire to seek out and save the lost, bringing salvation to every home and every soul.

We echo the sentiments of Psalm 103, blessing Your holy name and remembering all Your benefits. We praise You, O Lord, for You are "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love". Just as You forgave all Zacchaeus' iniquity, we pray that You would "forgive all our iniquity" and "heal all our diseases". We thank You that You do not deal with us according to our sins, but "as far as the east is from the west, so far You remove our transgressions from us". Amen.

DEEP POOLING:

This is a time to share on more serious matters or when the input of the group is requested. This will not necessarily happen at all meetings.

SHARING ON THE ENDEAVORS:

We join teams in order to enlist the help of others in growing closer to God. The "endeavors" are practices which we voluntarily assume. They have been found to be a means of drawing us closer as a couple and in furthering our spiritual growth. By sharing on the endeavors at the team meeting we seek help and encouragement from our teammates in our journey.