



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA
PARISH OF ST. VASILIOS, BRUNSWICK, VICTORIA

SUNDAY
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PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

PROGRAM FOR 22—28 JANUARY 2017

SUNDAY 22 JANUARY <i>Apostle St Timothy, Martyr Anastasios, Persian</i>	15th Sunday of Luke —Luke 19: 1-10 • 7.30– 11.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
WEDNESDAY 25 JANUARY <i>St Gregory the Theologian</i>	• 7.00 am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
FRIDAY 27 JANUARY <i>Transfer of the Relics of St John Chrysostom</i>	• 7.00 am Orthros and Divine Liturgy



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WORDS FROM THE CHURCH FATHERS

Every Christian should find for himself the imperative and incentive to become holy.

If you live without struggle and without hope of becoming holy,
then you are Christians only in name and not in essence.

But without holiness, no one shall see the Lord, that is to say
they will not attain eternal blessedness. It is a trustworthy saying that Jesus Christ
came into the world to save sinners (I Tim. 1:15).

But we deceive ourselves if we think that we are saved while remaining sinners.

Christ saves those sinners by giving them the means to become saints.

- St. Philaret of Moscow, Sermon of September 23, 1847

Fr. Athanasios
and
Fr. Ephraim

are available
at the Church

every Monday to Friday
between
4.00 and 6.00pm

for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

THE CHILDREN'S WORD Presvytera Alexandra Houck, myocn.net

Seeing Jesus

Do you like learning how to do things for yourself? Maybe you know how to make a little snack when you come home from school, or maybe you can clean your own laundry. You might have heard your parents tell you, "You have to do some things on your own!"

But as a kid, you still have some things you depend on others for—like if you want to learn about our Lord. Right now, you probably hear about Jesus and about His Church from your parents. Or you might be blessed to have church school each Sunday, when you learn even more. When you are older, you will still want to grow closer to God, but how will you do that?

In today's Gospel reading, we hear about a man named Zacchaeus. He was the one who climbed up into a tree so he could see Jesus. Zacchaeus wanted to know more about Jesus, so he went out of his way to see Him!

In a way, we are like Zacchaeus too. Sometimes people will tell us about God, but sometimes we have to go out of our way to "see" Him, or to learn more about Him! One great way is by reading your Bible. Do you have your own Bible you can read sometimes? Another great way is by coming to church as much as we can. We can go out of our way too, just like Zacchaeus!

The Generosity of Grace: Homily on Zacchaeus for the 15th Sunday of Luke in the Orthodox Church

Nobody likes to pay taxes. The people of first-century Palestine were no different; however, the Jews of that time had additional reasons to dislike paying taxes, for their money went to support the Romans, pagan foreigners who occupied their land. It was collected by their fellow Jews who had gone over to the other side, who were viewed as traitors because they worked for the enemy.

If that were not bad enough, the tax-collectors were thieves, collecting more than was required so that they could live in luxury from the oppression of their neighbors. Zacchaeus was apparently one of the worst offenders, for he was a chief tax collector and was very rich. He was a short little man who, for reasons we do not know, wanted to see Jesus Christ. He could not see over the crowd, so he climbed a sycamore tree in order to get a better view. That must have been quite a sight: the tiny little tax-collector (whom everyone hated) up in a tree so that he could see a passing rabbi.

Even more shocking was the Lord's response when He saw this man: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." Jewish religious leaders would have nothing at all to do with people like Zacchaeus, but this Messiah was different. He blessed Zacchaeus with His presence, and the tax-collector received the Lord joyfully in his home.

Of course, others noticed what was happening. A man who presents Himself as the Messiah has gone to be a guest in the home of a notorious traitor and thief. No self-respecting righteous Jew would ever do something like that. He would be defiled by going into his house and eating with him. But before Christ says anything in response to the critics, Zacchaeus repents. He accepts the truth about himself, that he is a criminal exploiter of the needy. He says that he will give half of what he owns to the poor and will restore four-fold what he stole from others. He says that he will make right the wrongs he had committed. In that moment, this wretched man began to turn his life around. Jesus Christ, as He always did and still does, accepts the sincere repentance of the sinner, proclaiming that salvation has come to this son of Abraham, for He came to seek and to save that which was lost.

This memorable story demonstrates the generosity of our God. To be generous is to give freely and abundantly; it is not to be stingy or reluctant to bless. Zacchaeus did not even have to ask for the love, forgiveness, and mercy of the Lord. All that he did was to climb a tree out of curiosity, but that was enough to begin to open himself to the overwhelming generosity of Christ.

The Saviour did not shout words of condemnation to this man. He did not judge him in any way. Instead, He blessed him with His attention and care. When others complained about what a sinner Zacchaeus was, the Lord did not join in the criticism, perhaps because this dishonest tax-collector already knew that he was a crook. Instead, the Lord let Zachaeus respond in freedom to His generosity. He let him open his heart and soul to a divine love that is beyond the mere observance of a law and knows no human limit.

We can see that Zacchaeus got the point, for his response to Christ's generosity transformed him. The one who previously was greedy and selfish became a living icon of the abundant love of God, freely giving half of what he owned to the poor and restoring what he had stolen four-fold. No one told him what to do; no one required him to take these actions. No one had to because he had been transformed by the mercy, love, and gracious abundance of our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ. He had received a generous blessing and then became a generous blessing to others.

Zacchaeus stands as a wonderful example of repentance because he spontaneously and freely entered into the life of Christ. His actions shine brightly with the love and holiness of the Lord, which is quite strange because only a few minutes ago we spoke of him as a notorious, hated sinner. His amazing transformation reminds us that salvation is not a reward that we earn or a matter of what we deserve. Instead, our faith is about the mercy and grace of a God Who wants to share His life with us, Who stops at nothing to bring us into the eternal communion of the Holy Trinity. Sometimes it is those who have hit rock bottom, who know their own sins so well that they do not need to be reminded of them, who in their humility receive our Lord's generous mercy so completely and fully that they become powerful living proof of what God can do for even the most wretched human being.

King David, guilty of murder and adultery, became a man after God's own heart. Saul the persecutor of Christians became St. Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles and author of so much of the New Testament. Mary of Egypt was a truly wicked woman who fled to the desert in repentance and became a great saint. Recall also the thief on the cross who asked the Saviour to remember him in His kingdom.

A harsh, stingy, judgmental god would not make saints of such people. He would punish or destroy them. The good news is that the true God does not relate to us on the basis of our accomplishments or virtue, but in terms of His unbounded love, mercy, and forgiveness. Our salvation is a matter of receiving His generosity, of accepting His abundant blessing. The miserable Zacchaeus did that and we can too. But truly to receive Him is not simply to pray certain words or feel a certain way; neither is it simply a matter of coming to church services or following religious rules.

The Lord's boundless love must penetrate to the core of our being and become characteristic of our lives, if we are to share in His. Love for God and for neighbor must shine through our actions and words and purify our thoughts. If we have stolen and hoarded money, we must give it back generously. If we have ignored or neglected others, must learn to love them as Christ has loved us. If we have thought only about ourselves, we must learn to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Yes, that is our repentance: to become an open channel for God's merciful generosity in this world. He is the vine and we are the branches. And since the Father gave His only-begotten Son for our salvation, there are no limits to the mercy and love we are called to embody. We did not ask Christ to be born in a manger or baptized in the river Jordan for our salvation. We did not ask Him to die on the cross, to rise again, or to ascend into heaven. But He still did so, out of His unfathomable love for those who abandoned and betrayed Him. The only proper response to this divine love is to be transformed by it as we become a living and breathing icon of the unlimited generosity that is the only hope of the world.

The Saviour has come to us all, as he did to Zacchaeus. No matter what we have done or left undone, it is time to respond like he did, joyfully receiving Christ and allowing our lives to be fulfilled by the generous mercy of the Lord, and then showing that same mercy for others. Such true, sincere, humble repentance is the only way to the Kingdom of Heaven. The point is not to wallow in guilt, but to move forward in holiness. It is not to follow a legal code, but to enter into a blessed new life. That is how salvation will come to our houses, for "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."