

SYNAXARION OF THE LENTEN TRIODION AND PENTECOSTARION

On this day, the Sunday before the beginning of the Lenten Triodion, we commemorate the repentance of the tax-collector, the Holy Apostle Zacchaeus, who desired to behold Christ.

The Holy Fathers placed today's commemoration here to prepare us, little by little, for dawning season of Great Lent. Knowing that we are basically slow to exhibit a desire for repentance, the Holy Fathers, by Zacchaeus' example, teach us in these preliminary weeks, the need to recognize our sins and our need to turn away from them.

Zacchaeus, the Holy Apostle of Christ, was that earnest and wealthy chief tax-collector appointed by the Romans about whom the divine Apostle and Evangelist Luke speaks in his Gospel (19:1-10). As we learn from this passage of the Holy Gospel, Zacchaeus was very short, and hence, due to the crowds, he could not see our Lord Jesus Christ with his own eyes, as he desired when the Lord was passing through Jericho. He, therefore, went up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him. The Lord acknowledged this good will of Zacchaeus and his sincere faith and, as He passed by, He called him by name and announced His wish to be guest in his house, saying to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house" (Luke 19:5).

Zacchaeus accepted this proposal of the Lord with all his soul and he rushed with joy, and received Him in his home and offered Him hospitality with all willingness. It was not only because he believed in Christ with all his soul that he hosted Him with particular willingness, but also because he actively repented for his former sins and he said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor and, if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." (Luke 19:8). True, the Jews could not tolerate this and "they all murmured, 'He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'" (Luke 19:7); but the Lord, Who knows the hearts of all, saw his disposition and, honoring the power of his repentance, forgave and blessed him and all his house, saying, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham." (Luke 19:9).

Zacchaeus' conversation in this manner offers us two important lessons: first, God's compassion and the signs of sincere and active repentance and second, the fact that correction of evil as far as one is able, is an inseparable proof of sincere repentance. In this manner, the good Zacchaeus exceeded the ordinances of the Mosaic Law in his generosity, for which cause he was accounted worthy of the Lord's Blessing.

After the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord, it is said that Zacchaeus was a disciple of the divine Apostle Peter, who afterwards ordained him Bishop of Caesarea. His memory is also celebrated on April 20.

The Holy Fathers, knowing the weakness of human nature in our attempts to change from a sinful, self-centered life to one of humility and repentance, placed this Gospel lesson before us today to instill in us a desire to repent just as Zacchaeus possessed a desire to behold Christ. Having his example before us, let us now prepare ourselves for the approaching struggles of the Great Lent as we set out on our journey to behold Christ's Life-Giving Resurrection.

Through the prayers of the Holy Apostle Zacchaeus, O Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us.

Amen.