



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

**CATECHESIS PREPARED BY THE HOLY FATHER
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[[Multimedia](#)]

Cycle of Catechesis – Jubilee 2025. Jesus Christ our Hope. II. The life of Jesus. The encounters 3. Zacchaeus. “Today I must stay at your house!” (Lk 19:5)

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we will continue to contemplate Jesus’ encounters with some figures from the Gospel. This time, I would like to focus on Zacchaeus: an episode that is particularly close to my heart, because it has a special place in my spiritual journey.

The Gospel of Luke presents Zacchaeus to us and one who seems irredeemably lost. Perhaps we too feel this way at times: without hope. Instead, Zacchaeus will discover that the Lord was already looking for him.

In fact, Jesus came to Jericho, a city located below sea level, considered to be an image of the underworld, where Jesus wants to go in search of those who feel they are lost. And in reality, the Risen Lord continues to descend into today’s underworlds, in places of war, in the suffering of the innocent, in the heart of mothers who see their children die, in the hunger of the poor.

Zacchaeus, in a certain sense, is lost; perhaps he has made the wrong decisions or perhaps his life has put him in situations from which he struggles to get out. Indeed, Luke insists on describing the characteristics of this man: not only is he a publican, a person who collects taxes from his

fellow citizens for the Roman invaders, but he is the chief of publicans, no less, as if to say that his sin is multiplied.

Luke then adds that Zacchaeus is rich, suggesting that he has grown rich on the backs of others, abusing his position. But all this has consequences: Zacchaeus probably feels excluded, despised by everyone.

When he comes to know that Jesus is passing through the city, Zacchaeus feels the desire to see Him. He does not dare to imagine a meeting; it would be enough to watch him from a distance. However, our desires encounter obstacles and are not automatically fulfilled: Zacchaeus is short! It is our reality: we have limitations that we have to deal with. And then there are others, who sometimes do not help us: the crowd prevents Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus. Perhaps it is something of a revenge on their part.

But when you have a strong desire, you do not lose heart. You find a solution. However, you need to be courageous and unashamed; you need a little of the simplicity of children and not to worry about your own image. Zacchaeus, just like a child, climbs a tree. It should be a good vantage point, especially in order to watch without being seen, hiding behind the branches.

But with the Lord, the unexpected always happens. Jesus, when He comes close, raises His eyes. Zacchaeus feels he has been discovered, and probably expects a public rebuke. The people may have hoped for it, but they are disappointed: Jesus asks Zacchaeus to come down immediately, almost surprised to see him in the tree, and says to him, "Today I must stay at your house!" (*Lk* 19:5). God does not pass by without looking for those who are lost.

Luke highlights the joy in Zacchaeus' heart. It is the joy of one who feels that he has been seen, acknowledged, and above all forgiven. Jesus' gaze is not one of reproach, but of mercy. It is that mercy we sometimes struggle to accept, especially when God forgives those who, in our opinion, do not deserve it. We grumble because we would like to impose limits on God's love.

In the scene at home, Zacchaeus, after listening to Jesus' words of forgiveness, stands up, as if he were arising from a condition of death. And he gets up to make a commitment: to return four times what he has stolen. It is not a price to be paid, because God's forgiveness is free, but rather the desire to imitate the One by whom he felt loved. Zacchaeus makes a commitment to which he was not bound, but he does so because he understands that this is his way of loving. And he does so by combining the Roman legislation regarding theft and the Rabbinic law on penance. Zacchaeus, then, is not only the man of desire; he is also one who knows how to take practical steps. His purpose is not generic or abstract, but stems precisely from his history: he looked at his life and identified the point from which to begin his transformation.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us learn from Zacchaeus not to lose hope, even when we feel we

have been cast aside or are incapable of change. Let us nurture our desire to see Jesus, and above all let us allow ourselves to be found by the mercy of God, who always comes in search of us, in whatever situation we may be lost.