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Angelus: our God is the God of surprises

During today's Sunday Angelus, prayed by Pope Francis with thousands of faithful in St. Peter's Square, the Holy Father commented on the passage from the Gospel of St. Luke that narrates Jesus' encounter in Jericho with Zacchaeus, the chief publican or tax collector for the Romans, who was loathed by the people who regarded him as a collaborator with tyrants and an exploiter. Zacchaeus, was curious to see Jesus, but his condition as a public sinner prevented him from getting close to Him. Since he was small in stature, he climbed a sycamore on the street where Jesus was to pass, so as to have a better view.

When Jesus arrived at the sycamore, He looked up and said: "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house". "We can imagine Zacchaeus' astonishment!" said Francis. "But why did Jesus say I 'must stay at your house? What duty was this? We know that His supreme duty was to carry out the Father's plan for all humanity, fulfilled at Jerusalem with His condemnation to death, His crucifixion and, on the third day, His Resurrection. It is the plan of salvation of the Father's mercy. And, in this plan, there is also the salvation of Zacchaeus, a dishonest man scorned by all and, as such, in need of conversion. Indeed, the Gospel says that when Jesus called to him, the people began to grumble, saying, 'He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.' They see him as a villain who enriched himself by exploiting his neighbour. If Jesus had said: 'Come down, exploiter, betrayer of the people! Come and speak with me to settle the scores!', no doubt the people would have applauded. Instead, they began to murmur: "Jesus goes to the house of a sinner, of an exploiter".

However Jesus, led by mercy, sought him out specifically, and when He entered Zacchaeus' house, He said: "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". "Jesus' gaze goes beyond sins and prejudices", emphasised the Pope. "He sees a person with the eyes of God, who does not stop at past evil, but rather perceives the future good; Jesus is not resigned to closures but always opens new areas of life; He does not stop at appearances but looks at the heart". And in the case of Zacchaeus, "He looked at a heart wounded by the sin of greed. ... He looks at that wounded heart and goes there".

"Sometimes we seek to correct and convert a sinner by reprimanding him, reproaching him for his mistakes and his unjust behaviour", he observed. "Jesus' attitude towards Zacchaeus shows us another way: that of showing one in error his value, that value that God continues to see despite everything, despite all his mistakes. This can bring about a positive surprise, which makes the heart tender and leads the person to bring out the goodness he

has in himself. It is about giving individuals confidence, which makes them grow and change. God acts this way with all of us: He is not blocked by our sin, but overcomes it with love and makes us feel nostalgia for good. We have all felt this nostalgia for good after a mistake. And God Our Father, thus acts, and then Jesus acts. There is no person who does not have something good. And God looks at this so as to bring him out of evil”.

“May the Virgin Mary help us to see the good there is in the people we meet every day, so that we are all encouraged to bring forth the image of God imprinted in our hearts. In this way we are able to rejoice at the surprises of God’s mercy! Our God, Who is the God of surprises!”
