

31st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Luke 19:1-10

The story of Zacchaeus is one of the stories of the mercy of God. What is important about Zacchaeus is that he takes responsibility for his actions. Taking responsibility is an important part of our confession. In fact, the Church teaches that the Sacrament of Penance is made up of four parts: confession of our sins, contrition or sorrow for what we have done, absolution or the forgiveness by the Priest of our sins, and penance itself. Penance means some sort of act where we try to make amends for our failings. To try and restore what we have damaged. We can do this either by our prayers or by charitable acts. But often this idea of penance is forgotten or downplayed. In fact, when others ridicule Catholics for confession and say that we can get away with anything because all we have to do is go to the Priest and say we're sorry and then we can go back to doing what we were always doing, they forget that we perform acts of penance.

That's what Zacchaeus shows when he says to the Lord, "I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount." He showed he would take responsibility for his actions and make amends for the wrongs he has done. That itself was enough for our Lord to say, "Today salvation has come to this house."

This is part of the genius of the Catholic faith, and, in particular, the Sacrament of Penance. No one accuses us of our sins. We, instead, accuse ourselves and we freely confess our failings. And it is true that we do not need perfect sorrow for what we have done. In fact, all we need is to recognise that we have committed sin even if we do not have perfect remorse. Because what matters is the recognition of God's law and that His will matters more than our own, and that we have a responsibility to chase after the will of God, in the same way that Zacchaeus chased after the Lord. When we confess our sins we

take responsibility for ourselves and for what we have done. We hold ourselves accountable before God.

Taking responsibility takes courage. It can be frightening because it can hurt our pride and make us embarrassed. Just like the crowd ridiculed Zacchaeus and our Lord people will ridicule us. But the true test of strength is not in never doing anything wrong, but in taking responsibility for what we have done wrong. And if people ridicule us or seek to shame us when we admit our faults then that says more about their own weakness of character. Just like Zacchaeus stand your ground. Stand strong in faith trusting in the mercy of God.