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DEDICATION OF THE ABBEY CHURCH

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, October 12th, 2023)

Hodie in domo tua oportet me manere.
This day I must abide in thy house.
(Lk 19:5)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

HOW SHOULD WE INTERPRET the Lord's request? Wouldn't it be somewhat intrusive? The Lord seems to be in a hurry: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down: for this day I must abide in thy house." The chief of the tax-collectors complies without taking time to think, and receives with great joy the Lord in his house.

What is then this house?

His house, or rather his lair, is the place where Zacchaeus has piled up the monies he and his proxies were mandated to collect on behalf of the Romans. Zacchaeus has chosen this work. He has even purchased this office for a great amount of money from the foreign rulers. Lowering himself by working in the service of the occupying power could but give rise to a deep contempt from his brothers according to the flesh. This was compounded by the habit of claiming more than what was due. The tax-collectors therefore appeared as fraudsters who were getting rich at the taxpayers' expense. St. John the Baptist had already invited the tax-collectors to search their conscience on that matter and to act

a. *Lk 3:13.* with justice: “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.”^a However, they paid no heed. Money and profit was their god. They weren’t in the least concerned for their neighbour, nor for God, the righteous Judge.

b. *Mt 9:11.* The fact that Jesus should take an interest in such men was thus likely to give rise to astonishment, and he will be criticised several times in that respect. The Pharisees hissed, “Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners?”^b This reproach was made precisely in the same circumstance, when Jesus invited a man named Matthew, who was sitting in his tax-office, to follow Him.

The Lord had then answered:

c. *Mt 9:12-13.* They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. Go then and learn what this meaneth, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” For I am not come to call the just, but sinners.^c

As Matthew left his tax-office to follow Jesus, Zacchaeus left his house merely to come and see Jesus. He didn’t dare to join the crowd. His small height prevented him to do so. Perhaps above all he was seized by shame. All of them knew him only too well. Maybe they even feared him.

However, these first steps towards Jesus bear witness to the power of the grace that is at work in Zacchaeus’ heart.

d. *Mt 6:21.24.* For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also. [...] No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other: or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.^d

Zacchaeus has thus renounced his god, and is on his way towards the true God. He had not yet found true happiness. His heart needed consolation for his loneliness. And as for so many others whose remembrance has been kept by the Gospel, he has the intuition that it is near Jesus that he will be able to find the answer he is expecting. It is near Him that he thinks he will be able to truly build, or re-build, his house.

But merely seeing Jesus is not enough:

And why call you me, “Lord, Lord”; and do not the things which I say? Every one that cometh to Me and heareth My

words and doth them, I will shew you to whom he is like. He is like to a man building a house, who digged deep and laid the foundation upon a rock. And when a flood came, the stream beat vehemently upon that house: and it could not shake it: for it was founded on a rock.

But he that heareth and doth not is like to a man building his house upon the earth without a foundation: against which the stream beat vehemently. And immediately it fell: and the ruin of that house was great.^a

a. Lk 6:46-49.

Wouldn't the house built on rock or on sand be human life? Building on sand means establishing one's life upon nothingness, upon that which is fluctuating and has lost its bearings, upon feelings and impressions. Above all, it means putting aside the treasure and the rock that are God and our neighbour.

So as to build on rock, we have to make the choice not to build by ourselves and around ourselves, but rather to know how to have recourse to God and our neighbour. We have to walk in the light of the Church and her tradition.

Encountering God, the Church, our neighbour, will allow light to flood the dark rooms in our houses, in our hearts. Zacchaeus wasn't opposed to that. He had gone to Jesus with an open heart, ready to listen to His word, and not with a will to cling to his treasures and practices.

Proportionately to his offering to light, the encounter with Jesus his going in a concrete and radical way to turn his life topsy-turvy. The tax-collector who used to be a niggard now makes a resolution: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wronged any man of any thing, I restore him fourfold."^b

b. Lk 19:8.

As he opens his house and his heart to the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus opens himself to the existence of his neighbours. From now on, Zacchaeus is no longer alone. He who used to be self-centred becomes himself merciful after having received mercy.

Jesus admires that: "This day is salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham."^c As a matter of fact, a heavy curtain has risen, that which used to close and smother this house and its inhabitants. Salvation, namely Christ, the Sun of justice, has entered this house.

c. Lk 19:9.

The soul of Zacchaeus, in which Jesus has now made his abode, has become part of the heavenly Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a gift from God for each man, and which is still under construction, according to the words of the author of the Apocalypse:

Behold the tabernacle of God with men: and He will dwell with them. And they shall be His people: and God Himself with them shall be their God. ^a

a. *Ap 21:2-3.*

Zacchaeus will no longer need to go out of his house to encounter Jesus. The Lord is present there, in his heart. There also, he encounters the neighbour he used to fear so much, so as to learn to show him mercy. In so doing, Zacchaeus becomes an apostle.

May Our Lady, Mother of souls and Queen of men's hearts, intercede for us. May she obtain for us to welcome her Son in our houses, so that He may abide in us, and the world abide in Him.

Amen.

