

# 415. The Conversion of Zacchaeus.

*By Maria Vastorta*

17th July 1944.

I see a large square, which looks like a market and is shaded by palms and other lower leafy trees. The palm-trees grow here and there, without any order and their top leaves rustle in the warm upper breeze, which raises a reddish dust, as if it came from a desert or from uncultivated places of reddish earth. The other trees, instead, form shady porches along the sides of the square, and vendors and buyers have taken shelter under them, in a restless shouting din.

In a corner of the square, exactly where the main road leads into it, there is a primitive excise office. There are scales and measures, and a bench at which is sat a little man who oversees, watches and deals in cash and to whom everybody speaks, as if he were very well known. I know that he is Zacchaeus, the exciseman, as many people address him, some to ask about the events of the town, and they are mainly strangers, some to pay their taxes. Many are surprised at seeing him worried. He seems in fact absent-minded and engrossed in thought. He replies in monosyllables and at times with gestures, which amazes many, who know that Zacchaeus is usually talkative. Some ask him

whether he is not feeling well or if any of his relatives is ill. But he says no.

Only twice he shows keen interest. The first time when he questions two people who have come from Jerusalem and are speaking of the Nazarene, of His miracles and teaching.

Zacchaeus then asks many questions: « Is He really as good as they say? And do His words correspond to facts? Does He really make use of the mercy which He preaches? On behalf of everybody, also of publicans? Is it true that He does not reject anybody? » And he listens, thinks and sighs. The second time when someone points out to him a bearded man, who is passing by with a little donkey laden with household goods. « See, Zacchaeus? That is Zacharias, the leper. He lived in a sepulchre for ten years. Now that he is cured, he has bought the furnishings for his house, which was emptied according to the Law, when he and his relatives were declared lepers. »

« Call him. »

Zacharias comes.

« Were you a leper? »

« I was and so were my wife and my two children. My wife was the first to be infected and we did not notice it at once. The children became infected sleeping with their mother, and I, when I approached my wife. We were all lepers! When it was found out, they sent us away from the village... They could have

left us in our house, as it was the last one... at the end of the street. We would not have caused any trouble... I had already grown a very high hedge, so that we might not even be seen. It was already a sepulchre... but it was our home... They sent us away. Away! Away! No town wanted us. And quite rightly! Not even our own town had wanted us. We stayed near Jerusalem, in an empty sepulchre. Many poor wretches are there. But the children died, in the cold of the cave. The disease, cold and starvation soon killed them... They were two boys... they were beautiful before the disease. They were strong and beautiful, dark brown like two blackberries in August, curly and lively. They had become two skeletons covered with sores... They had no hair left, their eyes were sealed with scabs, their feet and hands were falling off in white scales. I watched the bodies of my children waste away!... They no longer looked like human beings the morning they died... one after the other within a few hours... I buried them under a little earth and many stones, like the carrion of animals, while their mother screamed... A few months later their mother died... and I was left alone... I was waiting to die and no one would dig a hole to bury me...

I was almost blind when one day the Nazarene passed by. From my sepulchre I shouted: "Jesus! Son of David, have mercy on me!" A beggar, who was not afraid to bring me his bread, had told me that he had been cured of his blindness, by shouting that invocation. And he said: "He did not only give me the sight of

my eyes, but also of my soul. I saw that He is the Son of God and I see everyone through Him. That is why, brother, I do not shun you, but I bring you bread and faith. Go to the Christ. So that one more soul may bless Him". I could not go. My feet, ulcerated to the bone, would not let me walk... in any case... I would have been stoned, if they saw me. I waited carefully for Him to pass. He often passed by coming to Jerusalem. One day I saw, as far as I could see, a cloud of dust on the road and many people and I heard shouts. I dragged myself to the brow of the hill, where the sepulchral caves were, and when I thought I could see a bare fair-haired head shine among other covered ones, I shouted aloud, at the top of my voice. I shouted three times, until my voice reached Him. He turned round. He stopped. Then He came towards me: all alone. He came right under the spot where I was and He looked at me. He was handsome, kind, with a voice, a smile!... He asked: "What do you want Me to do for you?".

"I want to be cleansed".

"Do you believe that I can? Why?" He asked me.

"Because You are the Son of God".

"Do you believe that?".

"I believe it" I replied. "I see the Most High flash in His glory above Your head. Son of God, have mercy on me!".

He then stretched out a hand and His face was ablaze. His eyes seemed two blue suns, and he said: "I want it. Be cleansed" and He blessed me with a smile!... Ah! What a smile! I perceived a strength enter me. Like a sword of fire which ran searching for my heart, it ran through my veins. My heart, which was so diseased, became as it was when I was twenty years old, and the ice-cold blood became warm and fast-flowing in my veins. No more pains, no more weakness, and a joy, what a joy!... He was looking at me; with His smile He made me blissful. He then said: "Go, show yourself to the priests. Your faith has saved you".

I then realised that I had been cured and I looked at my hands and legs. There were no more sores. There was fresh rosy flesh where previously the bone was uncovered. I ran to a little stream and I looked at myself. My face also was clean. I was clean! Clean after being loathsome for ten years!... Oh! Why did He not pass by before? When my wife and children were alive? He would have cured us. Now, see? I am buying things for my house... But I am all alone!... »

« Have you not seen Him any more? »

« No, but I know that He is in this area and that is why I have come. I would like to bless Him once again and be blessed by Him to have strength in my solitude. »

Zacchaeus lowers his head and is silent. The group breaks up.

Some time passes. It gets warmer. The market place empties. The exciseman with his head resting on one hand is pensive, sitting at his desk.

« Here is the Nazarene! » shout some children, pointing at the main road.

Women, men, sick people, beggars rush towards Him. The square is empty. Only some donkeys and camels, tied to the palmtrees, remain where they were, and Zacchaeus remains at his desk.

He then stands up and climbs on his desk. But he cannot see anything because many people have pulled off branches and are waving them joyfully and Jesus is bending over sick people. Zacchaeus then takes off his garment and having on only his short tunic he climbs one of the trees. He goes up the large smooth trunk with difficulty as his short arms and legs make climbing difficult. But he succeeds and sits astride two branches as on a perch. His legs hang from that kind of railing and from his waist upwards he leans out as if he were at a window and he watches.

The crowds arrive in the square. Jesus looks up and smiles at the solitary spectator perched on the branches. « Zacchaeus, come down at once. I am staying at your house today » He orders.

And Zacchaeus, after a moment of astonishment, his face purple with excitement, lets himself slide down on the ground like a

sack. He is so excited that he is hardly able to put on his clothes. He closes his books and cash-desk with gestures which he would like to be very fast, but instead are very slow. But Jesus is patient: He caresses some children while waiting.

Zacchaeus is ready at last. He approaches the Master and leads Him to a beautiful house with a large garden around it, in the centre of the town. A beautiful town. Not much inferior to Jerusalem with regard to its buildings, if not to its size.

Jesus goes in and while waiting for the meal to be made ready, he takes care of sick and healthy people. With such patience... as He only is capable.

Zacchaeus comes and goes, busying himself. He is beside himself with joy. He would like to speak to Jesus. But Jesus is always surrounded by a crowd of people.

At last Jesus dismisses everybody saying: « Come back at sunset. Go to your homes now. Peace be with you. »

The garden empties and the meal is served in a beautiful cool hall facing the garden. Zacchaeus has done things in great style. I do not see any other relatives, so I think that Zacchaeus is single and lives only with many servants.

At the end of the meal, when the disciples scatter in the shade of bushes to rest, Zacchaeus remains with Jesus in the cool hall. In actual fact Jesus remains alone for a little while, because

Zacchaeus withdraws to let Him rest. But he comes back and looks through a slit in the curtains. He sees that Jesus is not sleeping, but is pensive. He then approaches Him. He is carrying a heavy coffer, which he lays on the table near Jesus and says: « Master... they have spoken to me about You. For some time. One day on a mountain side You said so many truthful things, that our doctors cannot excel them. They remained in my heart... and since then I have been thinking of You... Then I was told that You are good and that You do not reject sinners. I am a sinner, Master. They told me that You cure sick people. My heart is diseased, because I defrauded, I practised usury, I have been a depraved fellow, a thief, hard on the poor. But now, I have been cured, because You spoke to me. You approached me and the demon of sensuality and riches fled. And as from today, I belong to You, if You do not reject me, and to prove to You that I am reborn in You, I divest myself of the ill-acquired riches and I give You half of my wealth for the poor and I will use the other half to give back, multiplied by four, what I got by fraud. I know whom I cheated. Then, after handing back to each of them what belongs to them, I will follow You, Master, if You allow me... »

« I do want that. Come. I have come to save and call people to the Light. Today Light and Salvation have come to the house of your heart. Those who over there, beyond the gate, are grumbling because I have redeemed you sitting at your banquet,



are forgetting that you are a son of Abraham as they are, and that I have come to save who was lost and to give Life to those whose spirits were dead. Come, Zacchaeus. You have understood My word better than many people who follow Me only to be able to accuse Me. Therefore you will be with Me as from now on. »

The vision ends here.

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18th July 1944.

Jesus says:

« There is yeast and yeast. There is the yeast of Good and the yeast of Evil. The yeast of Evil, a Satanic poison, ferments more easily than the yeast of Good, because it finds matter more suitable for fermentation in the heart of man, in the thought of man, in the flesh of man, seduced all three by a selfish will, contrary therefore to the universal Will, which is the Will of God.

The will of God is universal because it is never confined to a personal thought, but it takes into consideration the welfare of the whole universe. Nothing can increase the perfection of God in any way, as He has always possessed everything in a perfect manner. Thus there can be no thought in Him of personal gain inciting any of His actions. When we say: "This is done to the

greater glory of God, in the interest of God", we do not mean that divine glory is in Itself susceptible to improvement, but that everything which in Creation bears the mark of good and any person doing good, and thus deserving to possess it, is adorned with the sign of divine Glory and thus gives glory to Glory itself, Which has created all things gloriously. It is, in short, the testimony which people and things bear to God, giving evidence, with their deeds, of the perfect Origin from Which they come.

Thus, when God orders or advises you to do an action or inspires you with one, He does not aim at any selfish interest, but at your welfare, with altruistic charitable mind. That is, therefore, the reason why the Will of God is never selfish, on the contrary it is a Will which aims entirely at altruism and universality. It is the only and true Strength in the universe which considers universal welfare.

On the contrary, the yeast of Good, spiritual embryo coming from God, grows through difficulties and hardships, as it has against itself the reactions propitious to the other one: the flesh, the heart, the thought of man, pervaded with selfishness, the antithesis of Good, which by its origin can be but Love. Most men lack the will of Good and consequently Good becomes sterile and dies, or lives so poorly that it does not leaven: it remains as it was. There is no grave fault. But there is not even

the effort to do the greatest good. The spirit thus lies inert: not dead, but unfruitful.

Bear in mind that not to do evil serves only to avoid Hell. To enjoy at once beautiful Paradise one must do good. It is essential. As much good as one can do, struggling against oneself and other people. Because I said that I had come not to bring peace but war, also between father and children, brothers and sisters, when such war was to defend the Will of God and His Law against the abuse of human wills aiming at what is contrary to what God wants.

In Zacchaeus the tiny quantity of yeast of good had leavened a huge mass. Only an original small particle had fallen into his heart: they had related My Sermon on the Mount to him. And they had done it so badly, mutilating it of many parts, as happens with reported speeches.

Zacchaeus was a publican and a sinner, but not through bad will. He was like one who sees things badly because the veil of cataract covers his eye-lenses. But he knows that once the veil is removed, he can see properly once again. And that sick person wants the veil to be removed. Zacchaeus was like that. He was neither convinced nor happy. He was not convinced of Pharisaic practices, which had already replaced the true Law. And he was not happy with his way of living.

He was instinctively seeking Light. The true Light. He saw a flash of it in that fragment of My speech and he hid it in his heart like a treasure. Because he loved it - bear this in mind, Mary because he loved it, the flash became more and more lively, vast and vehement, and caused him to see Good and Evil clearly and to choose rightly, generously cutting off all the tentacles which previously, from things to his heart and from his heart to things, had enveloped him in a net of malicious slavery.

"Because he loved it". That is the secret of success or failure. One succeeds when one loves. One has little success when one loves niggardly. One has no success at all when one does not love. In anything. All the more in the things of God, where, as God is invisible to corporal senses, I dare say, one must love perfectly, as far as a creature can reach perfection, in order to succeed in an enterprise. In holiness, in this case.

Zacchaeus, disgusted with the world and the flesh, as he was disgusted with the meanness of Pharisaic practices, so captious and severe for other people, so indulgent for them, loved the little treasure of a word of Mine, which reached him by chance, speaking from a human point of view. He loved it as the most beautiful thing that his forty-year-old life had ever possessed, and from that moment he concentrated his heart and thought on that point.

It is not only in evil that man's heart is where his treasure is. But also in good. Did saints perhaps during their lifetime not have their hearts where their treasure was: in God? Yes, they did. And that is why, looking only at God, they passed on the Earth, without contaminating their souls with the mud of the Earth.

That morning, even if I had not appeared there, I would have conquered a proselyte. Because the speech of the leper had completed Zacchaeus' metamorphosis. At the bench of the excise-house there was no longer a cheating vicious publican, but a man repenting his past and decided to change life. If I had not gone to Jericho, he would have closed his office, he would have taken his money and come looking for Me, because he could no longer live without the water of Truth, without the bread of Love, without the kiss of Forgiveness.

The usual harsh critics who always watched Me to reproach Me, did not see that and they could understand it even less. And that is why they were amazed at My having a meal with a sinner.

Oh! I wish you never judged, leaving that task to God, you poor blind people, who cannot even judge yourselves! I never went with sinners to approve of their sin. I went to remove them from sin, because they often had only the exterior aspect of sin: their contrite souls had already changed into new souls, living to expiate. So was I with a sinner? No, I was with a redeemed soul,

in need only of a guide to stand up in its weakness of a soul risen from death.

How much Zacchaeus' episode can teach you! The power of upright intention that excites desire. Upright desire that urges one to seek deeper and deeper knowledge of Good and to long for God continuously until one reaches Him, true repentance that gives the courage of abnegation. Zacchaeus had the upright intention of listening to words of true Doctrine. When he heard some, his upright desire urged him to greater desire and thus to uninterrupted research for that Doctrine; the research for God, hidden in the true Doctrine, detached him from the mean gods of richness and sensuality and made him a hero of renunciation.

"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and follow Me" I said to the rich young man, but he did not do that. But Zacchaeus, although more hardened in avarice and sensuality, was able to do it. Because, through the few Words related to him, like the blind beggar and the leper cured by Me, he saw God. Can a soul that has seen God, find any more attraction in the little things of the Earth? Is that ever possible, My little bride? »

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19th July 1944.

Jesus says:

« In My several beatitudes I enunciated the requisites necessary to achieve them and the rewards that will be given to the blessed

ones. But while the categories mentioned are different, the reward is the same, if you consider the situation carefully: to enjoy the same things that God enjoys.

Different categories. I have already explained that God with His thought creates souls of different tendency, so that the Earth may enjoy a just balance in all its inferior and superior necessities. If the rebellion of man upsets that balance, as he always wants to go against the divine Will, Which guides him lovingly along the just way, it is not God's fault. Men, perpetually dissatisfied with their situation, invade or upset other people's estates, either by means of true and proper abuse of power, or by attempts at such abuse. What are world wars, family feuds, professional warfare, but such active abuse? What are social revolutions, what are the doctrines that clothe themselves with the name "social", but in actual fact are nothing but arrogance and the very opposite of charity, because they neither want nor practise the justice they preach, on the contrary they overflow with outbreaks of violence, which do not relieve oppressed people, but increase their numbers to the advantage of a few arrogant fellows?

But where I, God, reign, such alterations do not take place. Nothing upsets order in My Kingdom and in the spirits which are really Mine. Thus the several -aspects of the multiform holiness of God are lived and rewarded, because God is just,

pure, peaceful, merciful, free from the greed of fleeting riches, joyful in the happiness of His love. Some souls tend to one form, some to another. They tend in an eminent manner, because all virtues are present in saints. But one predominates, and on account of it, that saint is particularly celebrated among men. But I bless and reward him on account of all of them, because the reward is "to enjoy God" both for the peaceful and the merciful, for those who love justice and for those who are persecuted by injustice, for the pure and the distressed, for the meek and for the pure in spirit.

The pure in spirit! How badly is this definition always understood, even by those who perceive its right meaning! According to human superficiality and to foolish human irony, and according to ignorance, which considers itself wise, pure in spirit means "stupid".

The better class of people think that the spirit is intelligence, thought; those who are more material consider it artfulness and malice. No. The spirit is by far superior to intelligence. It is the king of everything in you. All physical and moral qualities are subjects and servants of that king. That is the situation where a creature devoted to God in a filial manner knows how to keep things in the right place. Where instead a creature is not devoted in a filial manner, idolatries take place, and the maidservants



become queens and depose the spirit king. Anarchy which causes disaster like all anarchies.

Poverty in spirit consists in having the sovereign freedom from everything that is the delight of man, and for which man goes to the extent of committing material crime or the unpunished moral crime that too often escapes human law, but does not make fewer victims, on the contrary it makes more and with consequences which are not limited to taking the life of the victim, but often deprive both the victims and their relatives of their good reputation and livelihood.

The man poor in spirit is no longer enslaved by riches. Even if he does not go so far as to repudiate them materially, depriving himself of them and of every comfort by joining a monastic order, he knows how to use them sparingly for himself, which is a double sacrifice, in order to be prodigal of gifts to the poor of the world. He has understood My sentence: "Make friends by means of unjust riches". Of his money, which might be the enemy of his spirit, leading it to lust, greed and anticharity, he makes a servant that levels the way to Heaven for him - the rich: poor in spirit - a way completely spread with his mortifications and his charitable deeds for the miseries of his fellow-creatures. How many injustices the man poor in spirit mends and cures! His own injustices of the time when, like Zacchaeus, he was but

a greedy hard-hearted man. Injustices of his neighbours, whether alive or dead. Social injustices.

You erect monuments to people who were great only because they were overbearing. Why do you not erect monuments to the secret benefactors of destitute mankind, to the poor and working classes, to those who use their wealth not to make their own lives a perpetual feast, but to make life brighter, better and more elevated for those who are poor, for those who suffer, for those whose functional faculties are impaired, for those left in ignorance by overbearing people, because ignorance serves their hateful aims better? How many there are, also among those who are not rich, nay, who are little less than poor, and yet they can sacrifice the "two farthings" they possess, in order to relieve a misery, which, being without the Light which they have - and their behaviour makes one understand that they do have it - is greater than their own!

Those are poor in spirit who, losing their possessions, whether large or small, know how to keep their peace and hope, without cursing or hating anyone, either God or men.

The wide category of the "poor in spirit", which I mentioned as the first one - because I could say that without such freedom of the spirit from all the delights of life, it is not possible to have the other virtues which give beatitude - is divided and subdivided into many forms.

Humility of thought which does not swell with pride and does not proclaim itself super-thought, but makes use of the gift of God acknowledging its Origin, for Good. Only for that.

Generosity in affections, whereby one can deprive oneself also of them, in order to follow God, also of life, the most real wealth and the most loved instinctively by the animal creature. All My martyrs were generous in that way, because their spirits had become poor, in order to become "rich" in the only eternal riches: God.

Justice in loving our personal things. It is our duty to love them, because they are testimony of Providence in our favour. I have already spoken about that in previous dictations. But we must not love them more than we love God or His Will; you must not love them to the extent of cursing God, if man snatches them from you.

And finally, I would repeat it, freedom from the slavery of money.

Those are the different forms of that spiritual poverty that I said will possess Heaven out of justice. Put under your feet all the fleeting riches of human life to possess the eternal riches.

Consider the Earth and its deceitful fruit, which is sweet outside and bitter inside, as the last thing, and live working to conquer Heaven. Oh! there is no fruit there with a false flavour. There is the ineffable fruit of the enjoyment of God.

Zacchaeus had understood that. That sentence was the arrow that opened his heart to Light and Charity. It opened it to Me as I approached him to say to him: "Come". And when I came up to him to call him, he was already "poor in spirit". He was therefore capable of possessing Heaven. »