

**Meditation/Reflection to observe
2017 WORLD DAY OF CLOISTERED LIFE
—Pro Orantibus Day (“For Those Who Pray”)—**

A Matter of Salvation

Gospel Reading: Lk 19:1-10

At that time Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way.

When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” And he came down quickly and received him with joy.

When they saw this, they began to grumble, saying, “He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.”

But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over.”

And Jesus said to him, “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.”

Reflection:

Our Lord came to earth to seek out the lost and to heal sinners. His grace is the only real cure for all the ills of the human race. However Christ does not want slaves but sons and daughters who are heirs to His Kingdom. This Kingdom begins on earth through our progressive conversion and is completed in Heaven. Most of human life is spent preparing us to receive grace and live it here on earth so that we may experience lasting happiness with Him in the Beatific Vision. Though we cannot give ourselves grace it is a truism that as Augustine says: “God who created us without our participation will not save us without our participation.”

The Gospel for this WORLD DAY OF CLOISTERED LIFE (*Pro Orantibus Day*) is a witness to the divine call and our preparation. Zacchaeus has heard about Christ and is eager to see Him. His small stature demands that his eager desire to look on Christ drives him to commit a very humiliating act for an adult: *he climbs a tree*. This action shows Zacchaeus’ openness to salvation despite the awkward fact that he is one of the hated collaborators with the Romans, a tax collector. Not only were the publicans Roman collaborators but many of them took advantage of the lack of clarity in the tax laws to prey on their ignorant victims in collecting taxes. Though Zacchaeus does not appear to have unjustly profited from his position, his awareness of his collaboration and his need for repentance are enough for him to seek salvation. He has sacrificed his dignity in society by climbing his own cross, the tree.

Our Lord responds to this sacrifice with the healing words that He wishes to stay at Zacchaeus' house in defiance of all social convention among the Jews of his time. Zacchaeus responds by further desiring to make restitution for anyone he may have defrauded even going beyond the demands of the Old Testament.

The cloistered and monastic life would seem far removed from influencing a conversion such as Zacchaeus'. After all, cloistered religious exercise no active apostolate outside the enclosure. Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

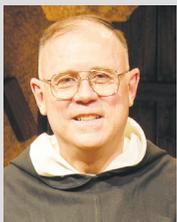
As is well known, cloistered religious do not put up their grills to isolate themselves from interest in mankind. It is rather to demonstrate that Heaven which is final union with God through Christ, is at the heart of the world and is the primary concern to every person's conversion of heart. Cloistered women and men surrender physical presence in the world to be a spiritual presence here by demonstrating in a practical way what the happy life of Heaven is about and by seeking out the lost through prayer.

As to Zacchaeus' rather spectacular conversion, one can wonder if someone who loved him prayed for that. By making reparation for a world gone mad with selfish egotism, the difficulty of offering their physical sufferings and spiritual asceticism of an enclosed community life in union through love for Christ, associates cloistered religious with His desire to stay with Zacchaeus. By giving up physical stays in the houses of people, cloistered religious can spiritually be present to every soul.

This should lead them through their unity with Christ in charity to also offer their lives as He did for the conversion of sinners and their ongoing free embrace of the spiritual life. In fact, cloistered religious can participate in the conversion of another by their union of friendship with Christ. Thomas Aquinas asked in *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 114, and 6 if it was possible to merit the conversion of another person. There the Angelic Doctor teaches that there are two participants in the conversion of each person: God by merit of strict equality who moves the person, as He is always first; and the person who by proportionate equality participates in their own conversion, if they are beyond the age of reason, by their free will. We must do our part to receive grace. Christ was the primary source of the conversion of Zacchaeus, but he did his part.

If cloistered religious are filled with friendship with Christ, though they obviously in strict justice cannot merit the conversion of others by their prayers and desires, nevertheless by their union of hearts God will want to aid in the conversion of others they pray for. Aquinas says: "But one may merit the first grace for another proportionately; because a man in grace fulfills God's will, and it is proportionate and fitting and in harmony with friendship that God should fulfill man's desire for the salvation of another, although sometimes there may be an impediment on the part of him whose salvation the just man desires." It is a fittingly friendly thing that God should want to do man's will in this. Thank God we have cloistered religious to pray so that all may climb the tree of their conscience, restore others whom they have harmed and thus have Him come to the house of their souls.

As we celebrate WORLD DAY OF CLOISTERED LIFE, let us remember these dedicated women and men who in convents, monasteries and hermitages give of themselves selflessly to God by their prayers and sacrifices. Let us offer these dedicated souls our spiritual and material support—in whatever way we can—so that they may merit the graces needed for the conversion and sanctification of our wounded and broken world.



Rev. Brian Mullady, O.P., is a nationally-known Dominican priest, retreat master, spiritual director, and television host on ETERNAL WORD TELEVISION NETWORK. Besides giving parish missions, Father Mullady teaches at Holy Apostles Seminary and the *Vita Consecrata* Institute. He also writes for a number of Catholic publications including the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, *Religious Life* and *The National Catholic Register*. He has published a number of books including *Both a Servant and Free* and *Glorify God in Your Body: The Theology of the Body for Priests, Religious & Other Consecrated Persons*.