

31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, C – October 30, 2016 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Sat., 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 1,000 words

In Guadalajara, Mexico there is a beautiful neo-gothic church dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is called the “Expiatory Temple of the Sacred Heart” – “temple” being a common way of speaking of grand churches in the Romance languages, and “expiatory” referring to the fact that it was built for the purpose of making expiation or reparation to the Lord for offenses against his Most Sacred Heart. In Paris, also, there is a great Basilica – Sacré Coeur – overlooking the city, also built to make expiation to God for offenses committed against him. Down through the centuries devout Christians have recognized the rights of God and sought to make reparation to him to vindicate those rights. Though, I do often wonder if, in our time, we haven’t largely forgotten about the concept of reparation.

A story of reparation is found in this Sunday’s gospel as well. Zacchaeus was a tax collector in Jericho, one of the wealthiest cities in the region. Tax collectors had to meet a quota set by the Roman authorities. But they often charged more than the tax tables required, thereby profiting off the people. Being in a wealthy area and being the chief tax collector there, Zacchaeus had likely routinely taken advantage of the people, extorting great sums of money from them and so becoming quite rich himself. He had done injustice to many, and over some period of time. And though he might have dulled his conscience and made such corruption a way of life, he could never silence his conscience entirely. All the while, his heart would have been seeking something or someone who could save him from himself and his sin.

Zacchaeus hears about Jesus and his interest is piqued; perhaps he even thought to himself, “Finally, a way out of this fine mess that I have made!”. But what a surprise it must have been when Christ not only gives him a hearing but tells him that he will come and stay at his house! Zacchaeus, then, helped by the healing grace of God that swept over him, immediately starts to set his spiritual house in order: “Behold”, he says, “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.” How many of the poor had he ignored during his life of sin? How many might he have even treated contemptuously? And how many people – and how much money – had he extorted? Whatever the case was, Zacchaeus resolved to right the wrongs, to restore justice where he had formerly taken it; and not merely, but generously. He recognized the need to make reparation and he pledged to do so. Because of that, Christ forgave him and said, “Today salvation has come to this house”.

Again, I wonder how many people have forgotten about the concept of reparation, that in the past led our forefathers even to construct great churches to make expiation to God? But the need for reparation wherever we or others have done injustice remains today, and is still a teaching of the Church. The *Catechism* instructs us that “Every offense committed against justice and truth entails the duty of reparation, even if [the one who did the offense] has been forgiven. When it is impossible publicly to make reparation for a wrong, it must be made secretly. If someone who has suffered harm cannot be directly compensated, he must be given moral satisfaction in the name of charity. This duty of reparation also concerns offenses against another’s reputation. This reparation, moral and sometimes material, must be evaluated in terms of the extent of the damage inflicted. It obliges in conscience.”<sup>1</sup>

As we reflect on our lives, we have a duty in conscience to ask honestly where we might have done injustice – to others, and certainly, by our sins, to God – and then endeavor to make reparation. This takes many forms, from restoring something stolen, to helping the poor, to

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2487.

giving to God's church, and so forth. When we go to confession we receive a penance – perhaps to say a few prayers. But we always need to question whether if by whatever penance we received we fully made reparation or satisfaction for our sins – and if not, seek to do whatever else is required. The *Catechism* again teaches, “Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must ‘make satisfaction for’ or ‘expiate’ his sins. This satisfaction is also called ‘penance.’”<sup>2</sup>

Something for us to consider during the coming week, then, and perhaps to make resolutions about: Is voluntary penance a regular part of my life? Do I make sacrifices out of love for God and neighbor, to right the many wrongs I have done? Am I morally indebted to anyone? So often we think of penance as a drudgery, but see how eagerly and joyfully Zacchaeus imposed it upon himself, having encountered the saving grace of Jesus Christ. He was not only forgiven but endeavored to make peace with all those he harmed. Our souls are temples of the Holy Spirit, and they are meant to become beautiful “expiatory temples”, offering to God his due, even when so many others might spurn the rights of God. When we read the lives of the saints, we see lives of joyful penance. May all our patron saints obtain for us the grace to make reparation, and to do so joyfully, like them. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1459.