And so, we come to Jerusalem. Jubilation and cheering accompany Jesus’ arrival: “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Luke 19:38 The crowd’s joyful shout is reminiscent of the song the heavenly host sang on the night Jesus was born.

We have come a long way since that night. Jesus’ ministry has taken him from his hometown to the center of religious power. The dusty roads of Judea are behind him. The cross awaits him. Chapters 18 and 19 can be summarized in a few powerful verses that reveal the essence of Jesus’ ministry.

In Luke 18:1, we are told to pray and not lose heart. How often do we find ourselves in situations that try our patience and our faith? We may wonder whether God hears our prayers. The parable of the widow and the unjust judge reminds us to be persistent. Don’t give up!

Time and again, Luke’s gospel describes reversals of social hierarchies and the upending of our expectations. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector examines one such reversal. It asks us to take a hard look at ourselves. Luke says Jesus told the story “to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt.” Luke 18:9

At first, you might think the God-fearing Pharisee is to be commended. He does everything right. He follows all of the rules. Yet, he also suffers from a corrupting sense of pride. The tax collector, the despised outsider, expresses not only humility but also an abiding sense of his own sinfulness and God’s great mercy. The lesson found here and repeated throughout our scriptures is expressed in these words:

“All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 18:14.

Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector, offers us yet another lesson on how we deal with wealth. Unlike a rich man Jesus met earlier, Zacchaeus vows to give up half his possessions to the poor and repay four-fold those he has defrauded. By his change of heart, Zacchaeus brings salvation to his house. He also shows us that a rich man can enter the kingdom of God. The challenge lies not so much with what we have, but what we do with what we have.

In his commentary on the gospel, Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes that Luke portrays the rich and poor “to express the inner response of human hearts to God’s visitation of his people in the ministry of Jesus and to his authority. The rich and the poor in the Lucan writings symbolize, in effect, the rejection and acceptance of Jesus the prophet announcing the new message of God’s salvation and peace.”

Grace, peace and we will see you on Zoom this Thursday at 6 p.m. as we continue to explore the greatness of the Lord.

Fr. Dion and Patricia