**33rd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

**Sunday of Zacchaeus**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.
 The Great Lent is fast approaching. Period of preparation for it is the most demanding of any fasts we have. If nothing else, we are shown how important the feast is by how serious we prepare for it.
 Great Lent, the period of preparation for Easter, itself is so important that we have to prepare for it as well. The Church calls us to *prepare* for the period of *preparation*.
 It’s similar to swimming, if you will. I can’t just jump into a cold swimming pool, I need to warm up first. The same way, I can’t compete in swimming events without practicing.
 Our spiritual life is no different. I can’t learn to pray if I don’t read the Bible. I can’t know God if I don’t pray, fast and do charitable works. And I can’t fast if I don’t prepare for it.
 And this period of preparation for Great Lent begins today. Each Sunday there is a special Gospel reading that focuses on a person or an event, but all of them show us fundamental aspect of ***repentance***.
 Great Lent calls our attention, in fact, moves us towards repentance. We prepare to meet the resurrected Lord, but we can’t do it without repentance. That’s why, as you may recall from last week, the very first word spoken by Christ when He came out for His public ministry was, “Repent.” He didn't come out and say, "Hi, my name is Jesus," but "Repent!"
 Christ preached, and taught, and healed people for three years. All this time He was doing one thing – preparing people for His death and subsequent resurrection. And He made it very clear that the only way to prepare for it is by repenting.
 So today, in the person of Zacchaeus, we are presented with the first steps towards repentance. We heard about a man who was too short to see Jesus, but who ***desired*** so much to see Him he climbed up a tree.
 So the first step in repentance is ***desire***. Repentance begins with desire to change. We can’t see God if we don’t desire to see Him. He is always here, but our eyes are always closed.

We always desire something. We can even say that our desire is our god. We desire to be successful. We desire to be wealthy. We desire to be loved and respected.
 We all desire something, but we absolutely do not want to work for it. What separates Zacchaeus and us? He saw an opportunity and did all he could. He humbled himself, he gave up his pride and honor, and climbed that tree. And Christ walked by, looked up at this poor short man on the tree and said, “Zacchaeus, it is time for Me to visit your house.”
 Desire drove Zacchaeus to do the unthinkable because he recognized that Jesus was the only One Who was able to fulfill his desire. And that desire was to become again a good human being, like we all are meant to be.
 Desire led Zacchaeus to repent. Repentance is not simply feeling sorry, but it’s actually completely changing our life. And we see Zacchaeus do just that – after receiving Christ into his house, he said that he will give away half of his money to the poor and repay four times over to anyone he wronged and ripped off, which is like everyone.
This is our first lesson on the road to the Great Lent – repentance begins with desire to see the Lord. Zacchaeus desired to see Jesus so badly that he left all his pride and dignity at the bottom of the tree.

  The Savior has come to us all, as he did to Zacchaeus.  No matter what we have done or left undone, it is time to respond like he did, joyfully receiving  Christ and allowing our lives to be fulfilled by the generous mercy of the Lord, and then showing that same mercy for others.  Such true, sincere, humble repentance is the only way to the Kingdom of Heaven.    That is how salvation will come to our houses, for “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”