

In the name of the Father and of the and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

To prepare us for great Lent, the Orthodox Church starts announcing its approach a full month before it actually begins. This is why we have today's gospel.

Today's gospel is about Zaccaeus the chief tax collector. In a couple of days will be celebrating the feast of the presentation of Christ in the Temple. In the story about the presentation of Christ in the Temple there was a man named Simeon. These two men had something in common. They both were longing to see the Christ.

Simeon had been promised many years previous by an Angel God that he would see the Christ before he died. Thus he was longing with all his heart to see the Christ. Simeon had lived a very holy life. It is said that he was one of the translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. If this was true he had to be over 200 years old. Simeon was well respected by all. He was continually in the Temple praying. He trusted God and live a righteous life knowing that God would keep his promise that he would see the Messiah.

Zaccaeus had heard about Jesus of Nazareth and longed to see him. But, Zaccaeus, was not a holy man. In fact, he was considered among the greatest of sinners. He turned his back on his Jewish brothers and sought after something he longed for, great wealth. In order to obtain this wealth, he went to the Roman occupiers of Palestine and offered his services as a tax collector. In order to obtain this position, he had to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods. He also had to associate with the Romans which was against the Jewish law. So, using his authority as a tax collector, he, not only when after the wealthy Jews, he also forced the poor to pay their taxes.

Zaccaeus wanted to see Christ; he wanted this so much that his desire attracted the attention of Jesus. Desire is the beginning of everything.

"Seek first the kingdom of God's righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

The prophet Jeremiah "you will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart."

Everything in our life begins with desire, since what we desire is also what we love, what draws us from within, what we surrender to. Somehow, Zaccaeus for our Lord knocking at the door of his heart and he suddenly had a great desire to know the Messiah.

If, as we prepare for Lent, there is a real eagerness in our hearts, if we have an intense desire for clearer vision of Christ, then our hopes will be fulfilled during the fast; indeed, we shall receive far more we expected.

Like, Zaccaeus, we need to raise ourselves above the passions and jostling of the masses and reach out to invite Christ. He is inviting himself today to our house, though we be sinners.

Zaccaeus had sought out Christ and desired him. We must seek him in order to find him and desire that he draw near to us and climb up high in spirit to meet his glance. Then he will visit our house as he visited the house of Zaccaeus and bring salvation with him.