

TODAY

A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Luke

SESSION 11

Today Salvation Has Come

Luke 18:1–19:27

Two men at prayer, a rich ruler, a blind beggar, and a small man in a sycamore

Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants watch a tax collector go home justified on nothing but mercy begged from a distance, then climb a sycamore with another tax collector and do the math of Exodus 22 on his fourfold restitution: grace received becomes justice exceeded, and the study's title word lands on his house: today salvation has come.

Catholic Touchstone: Humility as the foundation of prayer, taught by the Catechism from tonight's parable; justification as unmerited grace, where Catholics and Protestants agree more than either side's polemics admit, handled with a careful steelman; spiritual childhood, with St. Thérèse as its Doctor; and restitution as repentance's receipt (CCC 2412).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Luke brackets tonight's text with prayer parables. The persistent widow (18:1–8) is told, Luke says up front, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart: an unjust judge who fears neither God nor man is worn down by a widow's relentlessness, and the argument runs from lesser to greater: if attrition works on the corrupt, how much more will the just Father vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night. The parable ends on the question that haunts the journey: when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth? Persistence in prayer is that faith's pulse.

The Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9–14) is aimed, Luke tells us, at some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Read the Pharisee's prayer carefully: it is factually accurate. He does fast twice a week; he does tithe; he is not an extortioner. His prayer fails not by lying but by geometry: standing with himself, he prays to himself about himself, God I thank thee that I am not like other men, and the tax collector supplies his final comparison. The tax collector stands far off, will not lift his eyes, beats his breast (the gesture the Church still makes at the Confiteor), and prays seven words: God, be merciful to me a sinner. Jesus' verdict uses the word on which the Reformation fought: this man went down to his house justified, *dedikaiōmenos*, rather than the other. Tonight's steelman takes the strong Protestant reading at full strength: here is *sola fide* in miniature, a man declared righteous by trusting divine mercy alone, no works in sight, and the Catholic answer must begin with agreement, because the Council of Trent teaches exactly that nothing preceding justification, neither faith nor works, merits its grace: initial justification is utterly unearned, and the tax collector is its icon. What the parable does not adjudicate is what justification is (a bare declaration or a real transformation), whether it grows, and whether it can be lost, the questions on which the sides actually divide; and Luke himself will show tonight what justified mercy does the moment it stands up, in a tax collector named Zacchaeus. The Catechism sets tonight's parable at the head of its teaching on humility in prayer, and prayer's whole foundation is here: man is a beggar before God.

The infants brought for touching (18:15–17) draw the disciples' rebuke and the Lord's counter-rebuke: to such belongs the kingdom of God, and whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. Receive is the verb to press: a child cannot earn, buy, or achieve; a child can only be given to, which makes spiritual childhood the posture the tax collector just modeled and the rich ruler is about to

fail. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church, built her little way on precisely this text: remaining little means expecting everything from God as a child expects everything from its father, and her doctrine is the parable's finest modern commentary. The rich ruler (18:18–30) arrives with the right question and the wrong ballast: good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He has kept the commandments from his youth, and Jesus names the one thing lacking (in Mark's parallel, Jesus looks at him and loves him, Mark 10:21): sell all, distribute to the poor, treasure in heaven, come follow me. The man became sad, for he was very rich, and Jesus' camel-through-a-needle's-eye draws the crowd's despairing question, then who can be saved?, answered by the Gospel's whole hope: what is impossible with men is possible with God. Hold that sentence; Zacchaeus is its proof, one chapter later: a camel is about to go through the needle's eye, because God can thread it.

The third passion prediction (18:31–34) falls again on sealed understanding, and then, near Jericho, the blind beggar (18:35–43) cries the prayer the Church never stopped praying: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Rebuked by the crowd, he cries the more, is called, asks plainly (let me receive my sight), and follows, glorifying God. His cry is the root of the Jesus Prayer, and his Son of David is the journey's first public messianic title, shouted at the city gates' approach. Then Jericho, and Zacchaeus (19:1–10): a chief tax collector, rich, small of stature, running ahead like a child and climbing a sycamore, undignified and undeterred, to see who Jesus was. Jesus stops under the tree, calls him by name, and self-invites with the study's word: Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today. The crowd murmurs the meals-thread murmur (he has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner), and Zacchaeus stands and answers with receipts: half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold. Tonight's live discovery sends the group to Exodus 22:1: fourfold restitution is the Law's penalty for a stolen sheep killed or sold (a stolen ox cost fivefold), far beyond the ordinary fraud rule of principal plus a fifth, and Zacchaeus volunteers the sheep-thief's penalty across the board while also halving his fortune for the poor, repentance outbidding the statute. The Catechism cites his pledge in its teaching on restitution (CCC 2412): stolen goods must go back, and mercy received becomes justice performed. Then the title verse: today, sēmeron, salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham; and the journey's thesis: the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost, the shepherd of chapter 15 signing his own parable. The pounds (19:11–27) close the section as Jerusalem nears: a nobleman gone to receive a kingdom, servants trading in his absence, and a warning against burying what was given for increase; supposing the kingdom was to appear immediately was the crowd's mistake, and stewardship in the interval is the correction.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Sir 35:17–22 (Sirach) The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds; the Lord will not delay — **Lk 18:1–8**

Ps 51:1, 17 Have mercy on me, O God; a broken and contrite heart — **Lk 18:13**

Ex 22:1 Fourfold restitution for a stolen sheep killed or sold; fivefold for an ox — **Lk 19:8**

Ezek 34:16 I will seek the lost and bring back the strayed — **Lk 19:10**

2 Sam 7 with Isa 11:1 Son of David: the messianic title cried at Jericho — **Lk 18:38–39**

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine of Hippo (*Sermon 115, on the Pharisee and the tax collector*)

Augustine diagnoses the Pharisee's prayer as a journey that never left home: he went up to pray and preferred to praise himself, and asking nothing, he received nothing. The tax collector stood far off, Augustine preaches, yet God was near; he dared not lift his eyes, and the one who made eyes looked upon him. He kept no merits in view, and so mercy had room to work; for the physician comes to the one who shows the wound, not to the one who hides it under trophies.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thérèse of Lisieux (*Story of a Soul; Her Last Conversations*)

Thérèse, Doctor of the little way, made the Gospel's call to become like a child her entire theology: to remain little, she said in her last conversations, is to recognize one's nothingness and expect everything from the good God, as a small child expects everything from its father, worrying about nothing, earning nothing, and glorying in one's poverty because it is precisely the empty hands that the Father delights to fill. Sanctity, she insisted, is not a ladder of achievements but an elevator, the arms of Jesus, for those small enough to be picked up, an image she set down in *Story of a Soul* (Manuscript C).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Alexandria (*Commentary on Luke, on Zacchaeus*)

Cyril delights in the sycamore: the man too small to see over the crowd was not too proud to climb like a boy, and curiosity carried him where dignity never would have. Christ, who calls whom he already sees, summoned him by name and lodged with him before any amends were spoken, and grace so received became munificence: the extortioner turned distributor, restoring fourfold what fraud had taken, so that the house that had been a counting-table of injustice heard salvation pronounced over it in a day.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 2559 Humility as the foundation of prayer: man is a beggar before God, taught with tonight's tax collector in view.

CCC 2613 Luke's three parables of prayer: the friend at midnight, the widow, and the Pharisee and tax collector.

CCC 1987–1992, 2010 Justification: conversion as grace's work from first to last; no one merits the initial grace of forgiveness.

CCC 2412 Restitution: commutative justice requiring return of stolen goods, with Zacchaeus's pledge cited.

CCC 2667 The Jesus Prayer: the blind beggar's cry become the Church's ceaseless breath.

THREAD WATCH

Today / sēmeron (DEVELOPS TONIGHT, resolves Session 14): 19:5 and 19:9: I must stay at your house today; today salvation has come to this house. Have the group say the tally aloud: 2:11, 4:21, 19:5, 19:9. One more remains, and it will be spoken from a cross.

Lost and found (RESOLVES TONIGHT): 19:10 is the shepherd of chapter 15 signing his work: the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost. Close the loop from Session 9 out loud.

Meals with sinners (develops): The murmur at 19:7 is 15:2 verbatim in spirit. One table remains after this one.

Exalted and humbled (develops): 18:14 repeats 14:11 word for word. Luke says nothing twice by accident.

SESSION GOALS

1. Ground perseverance in prayer with the widow, and humility in prayer with the tax collector, as the Catechism does.
2. Run the justification steelman with genuine charity: agree where Trent agrees, locate the real disputes precisely, and let Zacchaeus embody what justified mercy does.
3. Set spiritual childhood between the infants and the rich ruler, with St. Thérèse as guide.
4. Pray the blind beggar's cry and name it as the Jesus Prayer's root.
5. Run the Exodus 22 discovery on Zacchaeus's fourfold pledge, and let the title word land on his house with full weight.

Time Note (75–90 minutes)

If pressed, take the widow (Q1) in five brisk minutes, fold the third passion prediction into your framing of Q5, and let the pounds live in the Dig Deeper box alone. Never cut Q2 and Q3 (the tax collector and the steelman) or Q6 (Zacchaeus and the discovery); tonight exists to put those two tax collectors side by side.

Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *God, be merciful to us sinners. Teach us tonight to pray without losing heart, to stand in the back with empty hands, and to climb whatever we must climb to see Jesus. And if you should stop under our tree and call our name, give us Zacchaeus's haste, and his joy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS (10 MIN)

W1. What is something you kept asking for, long past the point of reasonableness, that you eventually received? What kept you asking?

W2. When you pray, honestly: do you come with a case to present, or with empty hands? What built that habit?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT (50–60 MIN)

HOW TO LEAD THIS SECTION

Tonight's architecture is two tax collectors: one justified in the temple at Q2, one transformed in Jericho at Q6, and the road between them runs through children, a rich man, and a blind beggar. Keep pointing forward: the man in the temple shows what grace receives; the man in the tree shows what grace does.

1. Read Luke 18:1–8. Luke gives away the moral before the story: always pray, never lose heart. How does the argument from the unjust judge actually work, and what makes verse 8's closing question so unsettling after such an encouraging parable?

Leader: *Lesser to greater: if attrition moves the corrupt, how much more the just Father. Verse 8 flips the lens: the question is not whether God will answer but whether persistent faith will still exist to be found.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The argument is a fortiori, from lesser to greater: if a judge who fears neither God nor man finally vindicates a widow just to stop the pounding, how much more will the just Father vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night? God is not the unjust judge but his opposite; the widow's only leverage was persistence, while ours is a Father's love. Sirach promised it long before: the prayer of the humble pierces the clouds. But verse 8 turns the parable around to face us: when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth? Heaven's willingness was never in question; earth's perseverance is. The widow is not a technique for moving God. She is a portrait of the faith he hopes to find still knocking when he returns.

2. Read Luke 18:9–14 slowly. Fact-check the Pharisee's prayer: is anything he says false? Then where does it fail? Now the tax collector: his posture, his gesture, his seven words. And weigh the verdict's exact wording: this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

***Leader:** The Pharisee's resume is accurate; the failure is the geometry (prays with himself, thanks God he is not like other men, needs the tax collector as a foil). The gesture at the breast survives in the Confiteor. Justified, dedikaiōmenos: hold the word for Q3.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Nothing the Pharisee says is false, and that is the trap: he really does fast and tithe, and he is genuinely not an extortioner. His prayer fails by direction, not by data. Luke says he prayed thus with himself, a closed circuit: five sentences, one thank-you whose content is comparison, and a tax collector conscripted as the measuring stick. He asks for nothing, so, as St. Augustine preached, he receives nothing; the physician passes by the man hiding his wound under trophies. The tax collector's whole liturgy is distance, downcast eyes, a fist on the breast (the Church still makes his gesture at the Confiteor: through my fault), and seven words that echo the Miserere: God, be merciful to me a sinner. And the verdict lands on the Reformation's own word: this man went down to his house **justified**, *dedikaiōmenos*, rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted, 14:11 repeated to the letter. Hold that word justified with both hands; the next question is about it.

3. Steelman chain: The strong Protestant reading of this parable: here is justification by faith alone in one scene, a sinner declared righteous by casting himself on mercy, with no works, no sacraments, no cooperation in sight, and Catholic theology complicates what Jesus made simple. Give that reading its full force. Then test it: what does the Council of Trent actually teach about how justification begins? And what does this parable leave unsettled about what justification is and what it does next?

***Leader:** Begin with agreement: Trent teaches initial justification is utterly unmerited; the tax collector is common ground, not contested ground. The real disputes: is justification declaration only or transformation; does it grow; can it be lost. The parable does not adjudicate those. Zacchaeus, three questions from now, shows justified mercy in motion.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Begin where honesty begins: the steelman's central claim is one the Catholic Church teaches. The Council of Trent is explicit that nothing preceding justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification; it is given freely, and the sinner's part at the threshold is exactly this man's: empty hands and a plea for mercy, a plea Trent describes as itself grace-enabled, the free assent and cooperation of a heart already moved by prevenient grace (Session VI, ch. 5), meriting nothing. So the tax collector is not Protestant property; he is common ground, and Catholics should say so gladly. What the parable does not settle are the questions on which the traditions actually divide: whether justification is itself a forensic declaration of righteousness, with real inner renewal assigned to a distinct and inseparable work of sanctification (the classical Protestant view), or an infused grace that itself transforms, God's love poured into the heart making the sinner truly just (the Catholic view); whether it grows through a life of faith working in love; whether it can be forfeited by grave sin and restored in penance. On those, tonight's text is silent, and forcing it to speak either way abuses it. But Luke is not silent for long: in half a chapter another tax collector will receive mercy at his own table, and we will get to watch what justification does when it stands up, half to the poor, fourfold to the defrauded. Grace that is real grows hands (CCC 1987–1992, 2010).

4. Read Luke 18:15–30. Two receptions of the kingdom, side by side: infants who can only receive, and a ruler who has kept everything and owns everything. What does receive the kingdom like a child actually mean, what one thing does the rich ruler lack, and what is the crowd's despairing question answered with?

Leader: Receive is the verb: children cannot earn. St. Thérèse in the Voices box is the commentary. The ruler lacks lack itself. And 18:27 is the hinge Zacchaeus will prove: what is impossible with men is possible with God.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Luke has set a deliberate diptych. On one panel, infants, brought, carried, capable of nothing but being given to, and Jesus rules: to such belongs the kingdom, and whoever does not receive it like a child shall not enter. The verb is the theology: children do not earn, negotiate, or achieve; they receive, which is what the tax collector just did and what St. Thérèse turned into a doctrine, expecting everything from the good God as a child from its father, glorying in the empty hands he delights to fill. On the other panel, a ruler with full hands: commandments kept from youth, wealth secured, and one thing lacking, the lack itself. Sell all, give to the poor, come follow me is not a universal tariff but this man's one door, and he went away sad, for he was very rich: the only person in the Gospel who leaves Jesus sad, sadness being what unfollowed vocation feels like. The camel and the needle's eye wring from the crowd the right despair, then who can be saved?, and receive the Gospel's whole answer: what is impossible with men is possible with God. Keep that sentence loaded. In the next chapter, God threads the needle, and the camel's name is Zacchaeus.

5. Read Luke 18:35–43. The blind beggar at Jericho: what does he cry, what does the crowd do, and what does he do about the crowd? What title does he give Jesus, and why does that matter this close to Jerusalem? The Church never stopped praying his prayer; where does it live now?

Leader: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me: the first public messianic title of the journey, shouted louder under rebuke. The Jesus Prayer (CCC 2667). He follows, glorifying God.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The beggar cannot see Jesus, but he has heard enough to name him better than the seeing crowd: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me, the covenant title of 2 Samuel 7 shouted in public for the first time on this journey, at Jericho, the last stop before Jerusalem. The crowd's rebuke is a hinge: silenced, he cried out all the more, persistence (Q1's widow) and humility (Q2's tax collector) fused in one voice. Jesus stops, has him called, asks the question he asks every one of us, what do you want me to do for you?, and the man wastes no syllables: Lord, let me receive my sight. Healed, he follows him, glorifying God, sight's first use being discipleship. And his prayer outlived him: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me became the Jesus Prayer of the Church's unceasing breath, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner (CCC 2667). The beggar of Jericho taught the Church how to pray without ceasing: one sentence, all beggary, all faith.

6. Read Luke 19:1–10. Gather Zacchaeus's file: his job, his wealth, his height, and what he is willing to look like to see Jesus. Then the two todays (19:5, 19:9). **Live discovery:** when Zacchaeus pledges fourfold restitution, he is quoting a statute. Find Exodus 22:1 and do the math: what did the Law require, for

what crime, and what has Zacchaeus volunteered on top of it? Then weigh 19:10 against the parable of the lost sheep.

***Leader:** Chief tax collector, rich, small, running ahead and climbing like a boy: dignity spent for sight. Ex 22:1: fourfold for a stolen sheep killed or sold (fivefold for an ox); Zacchaeus applies the sheep-thief's penalty across the board and halves his goods besides. CCC 2412 cites him. 19:10 signs chapter 15.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Zacchaeus is the rich ruler's mirror image: also wealthy, also seeking, but small enough, in every sense, to run ahead and climb a tree like a boy, spending his dignity to buy a sightline, receiving the kingdom like a child in the most literal posture in the Gospels. Jesus stops, calls him by name, and self-invites with the study's own word: make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house **today**. The murmur of 15:2 rises on cue, and Zacchaeus answers it standing, with receipts: half of my goods to the poor, and fourfold to anyone defrauded. The group's math tells the story: Exodus 22:1 sets fourfold restitution as the penalty for stealing a sheep and killing or selling it, theft with no way back (a stolen ox cost fivefold); ordinary fraud owed the principal plus a fifth (Lev 6:5). Zacchaeus volunteers the sheep-thief's full tariff across his whole ledger and liquidates half his fortune besides: repentance outbidding the statute, mercy received becoming justice exceeded, the exact transformation Q3 said to watch for, and the Catechism's own example of restitution (CCC 2412). Then the two verdicts: **today** salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham, sēmeron's fourth landing (2:11, 4:21, 19:5, 19:9, one remains); and the journey's thesis, the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost: the shepherd of chapter 15, signing his own parable under a sycamore. The camel is through the needle. God threaded it.

DIG DEEPER: THE POUNDS AND THE INTERVAL

Luke appends the parable of the pounds (19:11–27) because they supposed the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. A nobleman departs to receive a kingdom; servants trade with his pounds in the interval; and the reckoning honors increase and condemns the napkin burial of a gift. The correction aims at every generation's apocalyptic impatience: between the sycamore and the Second Coming stretches the age of stewardship, and the question at the audit will not be did you predict the timing but what did you do with what you were handed. Trade with these till I come (19:13) is the Church's whole job description in six words.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT (10 MIN)

S1. Whose prayer is yours this season, honestly: the Pharisee's inventory or the tax collector's seven words? Try praying only God, be merciful to me a sinner for two minutes tonight and notice what it costs you to ask for nothing else.

S2. Zacchaeus's repentance had receipts. Is there anything in your life, money, reputation, time, a relationship, that conversion would require you to actually pay back? What would fourfold look like?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray the Jesus Prayer, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner, on your

commute or in line, until the beggar's cry becomes your breath.

- Make one act of restitution this week: a debt repaid, an apology owed, something returned. Let repentance write a receipt.
- Before next session, read Luke 19:28–21:38: the entry into Jerusalem. Watch what the crowd shouts at the gates, and remember Session 8's closing verse.

Scripture memory: **Luke 18:13**, *God, be merciful to me a sinner!* (RSV2CE)

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us. Find us in whatever tree we have climbed to see you, call us by name, and stay in our house today. Make our repentance concrete, our hands empty, and our hearts small enough for your kingdom, for you came to seek and to save the lost, and we are they. Amen.*

Leader Reference Card: Session 11

Every passage used tonight, in order of appearance. Exodus 22:1 is the discovery bookmark; Psalm 51 stands behind the tax collector.

Passage Used for

Luke 18:1–8 Q1: the persistent widow

Sirach 35:17–22 Q1: the humble prayer that pierces clouds

Luke 18:9–14 Q2-Q3: Pharisee and tax collector; dedikaiōmenos

Psalm 51:1, 17 Q2: the Miserere behind the seven words

Luke 18:15–30 Q4: the children and the rich ruler

Luke 18:35–43 Q5: the blind beggar; the Jesus Prayer

Luke 19:1–10 Q6: Zacchaeus; sēmeron twice

Exodus 22:1 Q6 live discovery: fourfold restitution

Leviticus 6:1–5 Q6: the ordinary fraud tariff, for contrast

Luke 19:11–27 Dig Deeper: the pounds

CCC 2559, 2613, 1987–1992, 2010, 2412, 2667 Catechism Connection

Next week: Luke 19:28–21:38: the entry, the temple, and the Olivet discourse. Bookmark Psalm 118:26 and keep Session 8's lament in mind; also flag Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 together, for a discovery inside the temple.