

Three Paths to One Reward

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



The Church remembers three very different people, in some years, depending on the calendar, on the very same day. First is Saint Theodore Trichinas, who lived in the late 4th century. Next is Zacchaeus, whose story is told in Luke's Gospel. Finally, we read the Old Testament account of God's meeting with Satan concerning Job in Job 2: 1-10.

If we knew only the early years of Theodore Trichinas and Zacchaeus, we might guess that their lives would turn out very differently. Theodore was the son of wealthy parents and grew up in the sophisticated city of Constantinople. While still a young man he turned his back on the social and financial security of his family. He left the glittering city and went to Thrace, now mostly in Bulgaria, where he began a life of severe ascetical effort in a monastery far from any city. He used a rock for a pillow, and his clothes were not only simple but severe in themselves. It was due to the hair shirt he constantly wore that he was called "Trichinas" or "hairy."

Theodore chose his severe life, and was given the gifts of wonderworking and healing. Zacchaeus made a very different choice in his earlier years, one that would hardly seem to lead to the acquisition of spiritual gifts. Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco has written of Jewish tax collectors like Zacchaeus that their choice of profession "was bound up...not only with national, but above all, religious betrayal: to become a tool for the subjugation of the divinely chosen people [Israel] by coarse pagans [the Romans for whom Zacchaeus collected taxes], one had to deny the hopes of Israel, everything holy to it, its dreams..."

What happened to Zacchaeus in his later years? One day, he decided to risk looking foolish, scrambling up a tree to see Jesus, in a crowd that hated him for getting rich by betraying his own people. The result was that he experienced the Lord's forgiving love. He let God change his life, and later became a follower of the apostle Peter and a bishop, proclaiming the Gospel with power. Even though his personal choices and his early path in life had been very different from those of Theodore Trichinas, Zacchaeus found his way to the same reward.

Job's story is different from those of both the other men. He was a righteous man from his early days, so his path in life was similar to that of Theodore Trichinas. But through no choice of his own, his life was changed greatly when he was old. God allowed him to be severely tempted, and stripped of the many comforts of his life. Job's response, and his choice not to react as others urged him to, eventually brought him a great gift: a personal encounter with the Lord.

Troparion - Tone 8

With streams of tears You watered the barren desert,
And with sighs from the depths of your soul You made it to bear fruit a hundredfold.
You were a beacon to the whole world, sending forth beams of miracles.
O Theodore, our father, entreat Christ God to save our souls.
Kontakion - Tone 4
You became most wondrous in life,
O wise Father Theodore,
Exchanging the royal treasures of this earth for a hairshirt,
Thereby receiving a heavenly garment.
Pray ever for us, O venerable one.

The lives of the three men show us that many paths, even those that are rough, indirect and unpredictable, can lead to the reward of life with God.