

# Jesus and Sinners

## *Zacchaeus, Simon Peter, Sinful Woman, Samaritan Woman, Etc*

*Taken from the book of Fr. P. Ribes, s.j.  
"To be Like Jesus" published by the  
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### The Power of Acceptance

#### Intent of this Event:

- ✓ *To extol the transforming power of accepting others*
- ✓ *By accepting them we change them.*
- ✓ *By accepting sinners Jesus turned them into saints.*

#### Target Audience.:

*People engaged in the ministry of personal guidance: priests, counsellors, spiritual directors, confessors, etc.*

*With minor adaptations, also to Parents, Teachers and those in the ministry of education.*

### Introductory Considerations

- ✓ In Jewish Society, in Jesus' days the attitude of the Scribes and Pharisees and of "respectable" persons towards sinners was one of downright condemnation and contempt.
- ✓ Sinners and especially those who did not keep their religious rituals were rejected, proscribed and excommunicated from Jewish Society.
- ✓ Jesus, on the contrary, cared for and accepted sinners and those excommunicated, not necessarily their sins.
- ✓ Time and again, the Scribes and Pharisees complained: "This man mixes with sinners and publicans; he even eats with them!"
- ✓ However, by accepting sinners and loving them as they were, Christ changed them for the better and brought the best out of them.
- ✓ Jesus' unconditional love for them helped them grow in humanness, in moral worth and spiritual stature.

#### From Jesus' example we draw two conclusions:

- 1st** Sinners as we are, in order to grow in moral worth and spiritual stature we have to have the courage to accept God's unconditional love. Tillich expressed it beautifully when he wrote: **"We have to have the courage to accept acceptance"**.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>**. In order to help others grow - emotionally, morally and spiritually – we have to unconditionally accept them as they are.

# Bible Reflections

## Jesus and Sinners

- 1) **Zacchaeus:** Lk 19/1-10 & Mk 2/13-17 (Read the quote and reflect)
  - What sort of a person Zacchaeus was before meeting Jesus? Picture it yourself - his character, his behaviour.
  - What sort of person did he become after meeting Jesus?
  - What brought about that change? How? Why?
- 2) **Sinful Woman:** Luke 7:36-50 (Read the quote and ponder)
  - What sort of a person was she before encountering Jesus? Describe her character to yourself.
  - What sort of person did she become after meeting Christ?
  - What brought about that change? How? Why?
- 3) **The Samaritan Woman:** John 4:1-42 (Read the quote and ponder)  
(Same questions)
- 4) **The Adulterous Woman:** John 8:3-11(Read the quote and ponder)  
(Same questions)
- 5) **Simon Peter:** John 21:15-19 (Read the quote and ponder)  
(Same questions)
- 6) **Thomas:** John 20:24-29 (Read the quote and ponder)  
(Same questions)

## Jesus and You

- Have you ever experienced the love Jesus has for you?
- Did that experience ever change you for the better? How?
- In what way? Give instances of your life.

## Others and You

- Is there any person in your life who changed you for the better? Who? When? How?
- What sort of person were you before meeting him/her? Describe.
- What sort of person did you become?

## You and Others

- Have you ever changed anyone for the better? When? How?
- What sort of person was he/she before meeting you? Describe.
- What sort of person did he/she become because of meeting you? Describe.
- What do you intend doing from now on to help others change for the better?

## **THOUGHTS FOR REFLECTION** **AND/OR FOR AN INPUT:**

- Each one of us is a mixture of strengths and weaknesses, of positive and negative qualities.
- In truth, all of us have more strengths than weaknesses.
- We are like locked coffers concealing fabulous treasures.
- Our “potential-self” for goodness and love is far richer than our “actual-self”.
- There is a great potential for love, friendship, service, creativity, art, goodness, etc. hidden deep down in our hearts.
- Each human individual ‘potentially’ is a great saint.
- Unfortunately, we are more conscious of our obvious weaknesses than of our unknown strengths.
- We unfavourably judge others and self by measuring ourselves and others against our failures and weaknesses.
- We value ourselves and others by what we actually think we are, not by what we could be.
- We hardly ever think of our and others’ hidden potential for greatness and heroism.
- When rejected or criticized we freeze. We forget our personal wealth and riches; we get stuck in our mediocrity and misery.
- Criticism stunts our growth. Remember: “Labelling is disabling”.
- Only love and unconditional acceptance defreeze us, triggering thereby a process of growth and change.
- In the Gospels we see that Jesus accepted sinners unconditionally. No criticisms, no condemnations, no rejections, no expectations, only his love reaching out to them.
- This is why Zacchaeus, the Sinful Woman, the Samaritan woman and others, all of a sudden, were miraculously transformed. What was best in them came alive.
- **As long as we treat people according to what they seem they are, we shall not help them grow.**
- **Only if we treat others for what ‘they can be’, we shall enable them to be ‘what they really are’!**

## **APPENDIX ONE**

### **Ten Commandments to Change People for the Better**

#### **TREAT OTHERS AS JESUS WOULD TREAT THEM**

1. Do not look at their weak points.
2. Treat them as “princes”, as if they were already what they can be.

3. Do not criticize them, run them down, or despise them.
4. Show implicit faith and trust in them.
5. Accept them as they are now, with their failures and shortcomings.
6. Love them in spite of their sins.
7. Do not try to change them, just love them!
8. Do not throw expectations on them. Allow them to be themselves.
9. Do not blame them or in any way make them feel guilty.
10. Let them feel free to love or not to love you in return.

## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **Personal Examination Form:**

#### **Instructions:**

- ✓ *In silence, before God reflect on the questions below.*
- ✓ *If possible, take some jottings for future personal use.*

#### **Questions:**

1. Do I encourage all who come in touch with me?
2. Do I always show others recognition and appreciation?
3. Do I accept people as they are without trying to change them?
4. Do I force others to live up to my expectations?
5. Do I show dislike for their ideas or personal tastes?
6. Do I have preconceived ideas of what others should be or do?
7. Do I easily let people feel that I am disappointed with them?
8. Do I trust people? Can I confide in them?
9. Do I criticize people, condemn or accuse them?
10. Do I thank people for all they do for me?
11. Do I praise people for whatever good they do – big or small?
12. Do I forgive them and accept their excuses?
13. Do I empathetically listen to others, their ideas and their feelings?
14. Do I spend time with people?
15. Do I allow people to be ‘themselves’?

## **APPENDIX THREE**

### **Group Activities:**

#### **Note:**

- ✓ *In case you use these jottings for group events – talks, discussion groups, recollections, camps, etc – I append here some hints on Group Activities.*
- ✓ *Group activities are very efficacious to summarize the findings of the sessions and to recapitulate the main teachings and insights of the event.*

## **Suggestions for Group Activities:**

### **1. Re-enacting the Gospel Narratives of Zacchaeus, the Samaritan Woman, etc.**

- In their original form.
- Adapted to modern conditions.

### **2. Case Studies:** e.g.

- How did Fr E. D. Flanagan of The Boys Town succeed in changing young ruffians into law abiding citizens?
- How did David Wilkerson transform drug addicts into good young persons?
- You may read and comment on some passages of the books, “The Cross and the Switchblade” and “Run, Baby, Run”.

### **3. Role Playing:**

- Role-playing of imaginary cases.
- Replaying of real cases the participants have experienced.

### **4. Writing Short Scripts for Radio Plays or Motion Pictures**

### **5. Instances Taken from Novels or Pictures the Participants Are Familiar With**

- For instance: “My Fair Lady”, “To Sir With Love”