

6.20.2021 Third Sunday after Trinity (Luke 15:1-10)

*“Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This Man receives sinners, and eats with them”* (Luke 15:1-2).

The very first verse of our Gospel reading this morning tells us something about Jesus, He eats with bad people. Jesus eats with the kind of people that your mom doesn't want you eating with, and not only does He eat with them, He receives them. He welcomes them. Jesus is the One inviting these people to share a meal with Him, and as you know, to invite someone to sit down and eat with you is to invite them into your life. This morning we learn that Jesus eats with, and receives the dishonest and the notorious sinner.

To help us imagine what that would look like in our day, take just a minute, and think of someone, a person who may get our religious friends talking if we invited them to sit down and share a meal. Think of someone, anyone, who has a bad reputation, a checkered past, or a questionable occupation. If you have someone in mind, chances are, according to this passage, that's exactly who Jesus would be eating with, and for a good reason. Our Lord said, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance”* (Luke 5:31-32).

The tax collectors and sinners who drew near to Him, because by the grace of God they heard His call. Like the physically ill person seeks a medical doctor, the sin-sick soul is drawn to Jesus for healing, and yet, the Pharisees and scribes murmured. They tried to mock Him by calling Him a *friend of tax collectors and sinners* (Matthew 11:19). They tried to make the claim that by sharing a meal with a prostitute, a thief, a liar, or a murderer, Jesus was defiled. They tried to convince the people that by receiving sinners, Jesus had become one. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

*“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8). God doesn't change. When our Lord took on human flesh, humanity didn't change Him, He changed humanity, and so, when He reached out, touched, and healed a leper, instead of the leper making Him ritually impure, Jesus cleansed the leper. When our Lord stepped into the waters of a sinner's baptism, the water didn't purify Him, He purified the water, and when this Man, our Savior Christ, receives sinners, and eats with them, they don't change Him, He changes them. By His grace, they become more like Him.

Tax collectors and sinners drew near to Him, to *hear* Him, unlike the

Pharisees and scribes who drew near to Him to mock Him. In this passage, there are two very different groups of people. On one side are the tax collectors and sinners, who were drawn to Jesus for healing and forgiveness, and on the other side are the murmuring, self-righteous Pharisees and scribes who think they need no forgiveness. These distinct groups of people bring to mind this familiar verse from 1 John, which states, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:8-9).

The Pharisees and scribes had deceived themselves into believing they were without sin. These men were so busy looking at the speck in their brother’s eye, that they’d failed to see the plank in their own eye (Matthew 7:3-5). They were avoiding their own faults and failures by focusing on the failures of others, and we can all very easily fall into the same deadly trap of trying to feel better about ourselves by judging others. When we do so, we’re deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but, as St. John wrote, if we honestly and humbly *confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

A man who sets an example for us of how to avoid deceiving ourselves is St. Paul. Every time we celebrate Holy Communion we hear these comfortable words that Paul wrote, *“This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...”* Those words are written in Paul’s first letter to Timothy, and if you’re familiar with that Epistle, then you know what we hear during Mass isn’t the entire verse. The entire verse is an example of the humble confession of a contrite heart, and it reads like this, *“This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief”* (1 Timothy 1:15). The thieves, the liars, the notorious sinners who Jesus eats with are no competition for St. Paul. He places his name at the top of the list by declaring that he is the first and the worst of all sinners.

Jesus eats with bad people, and when we take a moment to consider the example Paul sets for us here, and throughout Scripture, the way he honestly confronted and confessed his own faults and failures, we find that humble confession is a step that leads to God’s promise fulfilled: *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Paul’s humble confession, and God’s perfect faithfulness, led to his extraordinary Christian life, and Paul is not the only example. We

could talk about St. Peter, who fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*" (Luke 5:8). We could talk about King David who cried out in Psalm 51, "*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me*" (Psalm 51:1-3).

In the examples of St. Peter, St. Paul, and King David we also recognize one reason why the liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer is in a particular order. Think about this: when we kneel down for Morning or Evening prayer, how do we always begin - by humbly confessing our sins. Before the Lord's Prayer, the Psalm, the Collect or the Creed, we humbly confess our sins unto Almighty God. At Holy Communion the General Confession is said just before the Consecration, and yet, we always begin with words of confession written in the Collect for Purity, where we ask God to "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit."

The importance of honestly and humbly confessing our sins cannot be overstated, because as you know, Jesus receives sinners, and eats with them. He welcomes the unwelcome. He loves the unlovable, and while the Pharisees, the scribes, and all the self-righteous people murmur and complain, sin-sick souls are healed, redeemed, and transformed. The One, True God who cannot change, eats with bad people so that they may become more like Him. Our Lord invites us to eat with Him at His table, a table He willingly prepared for the worst sinner by living the life that we could never live, and dying the death that we so justly deserved. So thanks be to God. Thanks be to God for sending, and giving, His One and Only Son to save sinners – of who I am chief.