

Tax collectors, sinners drew near to Jesus. Pharisees, scribes mocked, insulted Him, **This Man receives sinners and eats with them.** Jesus responds with three parables. First He likens tax-collectors, sinners to sheep, in the second to a coin, and in the final to a son. The point is: Jesus seeks the lost. He has come to save the underserving, unworthy. All are lost **for all have sinned, fallen short of the glory of God,** but that doesn't stop Christ from seeking them, offering forgiveness. He finds His sheep, His coins, His sons mingling with pigs, covered in mud. He finds us starving, desperate for the worthless pods. He comes to restore. He welcomes sinners home as valued members of His family. The father's statement is a summary of all three parables **Your brother was dead and is alive; he was lost, is found.** This is the essence of our faith: Jesus saves sinners.

The parable of the prodigal son is the richest of the three. To rightly understand, see yourselves in all three main characters.

See yourself as the old brother, you've worked, done your duty, striving to be faithful to God's Law and promises. You have the Kingdom, but still you have jealousy for what others have, or you look down upon others or you think you have earned something. You don't understand things rightly because you are selfish and envious of others. Repent.

We are less accustomed to see ourselves as the Father. How you are also like your heavenly Father. Forgiving one another; your forgiveness doesn't grant salvation, but it is real. It matters. It is the love of the Father in your life. You rightly act the part of the father when you do not give up hope, for your wayward adult children or loved ones. Never give up. When you plead with God in prayer to remember their Baptisms, when you cling to the reality Christ receives and eats with sinners; eager, longing to welcome back your loved one, and fully forgive the repentant. But we are not acting in accordance with our Father's character when we pretend as though those living in open sin are not in danger. Or some sins don't matter. When we want peace in the family at the loss of God's truth. Repent.

We are rightly, well-accustomed to see ourself as the rebellious son. Repent and live. The son repents, and before the son can get out his

rehearsed words out, to work as a servant or work to pay back. The Father stops him, cuts him off. You are restored. All by grace you live in the Father's Kingdom. Bask in His gifts. You have all things. Robed with the Father's righteousness. A ring to bear the family name, welcomed back fully into the family, and authority of your Father and His rule and reign in your life. And have a feast. The translation is **fatted calf**. But really is: THE choice calf, saving for a feast we've been longing for, hoping for, praying the day would come, for you. Celebrate a feast of eternity, forgiveness.

For He is the Lord whose love you cannot lose. No matter what you have done, no matter what has happened. You cannot stop Him. From His cross flows the only love and truth and forgiveness this world has ever known. This place, the Father welcomes the lost. Restores those who stray. We are unashamed in the Church to identify with tax collectors and sinners, that all live repentant lives.

Jesus, Himself, comes only for sinners. He comes to baptize Joshua today. He seeks out His lost sheep and searches until He finds His lost coin. He gives away His inheritance and welcomes back the penitent with joy. He calls and makes the dregs of society; the unworthy, the likes of you, tax collectors and filthy, defiled Gentiles, His sons and daughters by grace. We were dead -now alive; lost -are found. He remembers His promises and you are firmly in His hands.

You see from here in Luke chapter 15 from Jesus, the cause of rejoicing in heaven. Heaven is not rejoicing for children's hospitals, cancer survivors, help for the poor, or even anything good you do. What is the cause of heaven rejoicing? The baptism of Joshua. They rejoiced in God's forgiveness, the Absolution given to you; they rejoice, even gather with you now in the Lord's Feast. Leave death and pride behind. Hand those you love over to God in prayer. He loves them more than you do. Come to the Feast. Here is how we celebrate and unite as a family, with all the saints, the company of heaven.

The prodigal son is the parable above all parables. More than this, that is the story of your life, redeemed, restored, His child. That the mocking insults to Jesus are of greatest comfort for you, for here, **this man receives sinners and eats with them.**