

THERE WILL BE JOY IN HEAVEN OVER ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS – Biblical commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 15.1-32

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."'"

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they

began to celebrate. "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.

While the scribes and Pharisees wanted to take the population towards God, and therefore take them through the observation of rules and religious obligations, Jesus chooses a different way. He does not want to take mankind towards God, because he knows that if one wants to take mankind towards God inevitably someone will remain behind and some excluded, but Jesus takes God towards mankind and God towards mankind is done in only one way: the communication of his mercy and his compassion.

But these scribes and Pharisees, these very pious and devote people, rather than being content and collaborating with Jesus in his work, they are contrary. Let's read Luke's Gospel, chapter 15, from the first verse.

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him." So the dregs of society, the excluded and marginalized from religion, hear Jesus' message as the answer to the desire for the fullness of life that every person has inside.

How long can an individual live in a the wrong direction of his own existence, however deep in sin, there is always a desire for the fullness of life, of happiness, that unfortunately often has been chosen wrongly, and they have sunk into despair and sorrow, but this voice was always awake. And so there is in Jesus the answer to his desire.

"...to hear him." While Jesus is listened to by the tax collectors and sinners, the Pharisees the pious people, and the scribes the official theologians, *"...the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled,"* It is interesting that in the gospels the religious authority, the spiritual leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, avoid calling Jesus by name. Jesus means "the Lord saves", and they have need of this salvation on the part of the Lord and turn to him always with the a crude and derogatory term, "this man".

And here is the scandal, *"This man receives sinners and eats with them."* Not only does Jesus receive them, but actually eats with them. To eat with them means to divide with then one's life. If one eats with an infected person, inevitably his impurity is transmitted to all the others. They have not understood that with

Jesus, sinners, unbelievers, the impure, do not need to purify themselves to eat with him, but it is eating with him that purifies them. But the religious people do not understand this.

“So he told them this parable:” This parable that we see now was not for Jesus’ disciples, but for the scribes and Pharisees, that is for his enemies. It is a parable that is composed in three parts, in the first two it speaks of God’s joy, and in the third, known as the prodigal son, of the reasons of this joy.

Jesus says. *“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?”* Jesus assumes that the scribes and Pharisees consider it a folly. No sane person would leave ninety nine sheep in the desert, at the mercy of animals and thieves, to go and search for one that is lost without the certainty of finding it. Well, the logic of the world, which is the logic of convenience, it is not Jesus’ logic.

Jesus’ logic is that that does good for mankind. And so Jesus presents himself as this shepherd that abandons the ninety nine to go and search for the one that is lost. *“And when he has found it”* the scribes and Pharisees would imagine that the protagonist would be bound with a rope around the neck and , with the help of kicks, conducted to the fold, locked up and never let out again, scolded and punished. Instead, when it is found..... , *“he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”*

The lost sheep - to lose oneself in Luke’s gospel is the image of sin – is treated better than the other ninety nine. It is weak and the shepherd communicates his strength. Therefore it will have a relationship with the shepherd that no other of the ninety nine will have. In fact the shepherd carries it on his shoulder and shows his joy.

“And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me,..’ “ But as the shepherd of the parable invites others to rejoice, but here we see that the scribes and Pharisees grumble.

“.. for I have found my sheep that was lost.” This sheep will not be no more a sheep among the others , but a sheep that has a special relationship with the shepherd. Jesus continues: *“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents...”* Here is why Jesus communicates life to the sinners, because that the force of his words, the communication of his life, if listened to, can make one leave the world of sin and transgression and tune your own life with the project that God has always had for the creatures.

Then there is the second parable showing the delicacy of Jesus. Every time that he must make examples, he makes them always of men, but then here is a woman. Jesus does not forget the world of the women, and if first he spoke of a man, the shepherd, here a woman enters in the scene. A woman that has ten coins and she loses one. *“ what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?”* And also in this case the reaction is an explosion of joy.

“And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.” And again Jesus’ sentence. *“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* God rejoices, sinners are converted, the shepherd and his neighbours rejoice, the woman and her friends rejoice. Who moans? The scribes and Pharisees.

Here then is the third, that is for the scribes and Pharisees, the eldest son is presented, as a religious person who has always served his father as a servant his master, he always obeyed his commands, but for this service and the command did not understand the heart of the Father Then, while the Father rejoices for the

return of the son who "was dead and is alive again", the older brother, instead of rejoicing, judges everything with religious parameters of morality, he is indignant, becomes angry and does not want to enter the house.