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THERE WILL BE MORE JOY IN HEAVEN OVER ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS

- Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Link video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x01EulxXfoE>

Luke 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: And he said, "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 neighbours, 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 neighbours, 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 the Pharisees’ ambition was to lead the people towards God, and therefore lead them through the observation of rules and religious precepts, Jesus chooses a different way. He does not want to lead men towards God, because he knows that if one wants to lead men towards God, inevitably someone remains behind and someone remains excluded, but Jesus brings God towards men and God towards men goes through only one way: communication of his mercy and compassion.

But just the scribes and Pharisees, these very pious and devout people, instead of being content and collaborating with Jesus in his work, are against him. Let’s read chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke, from the first verse.

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.(Jesus) “ hence the scum of society, those excluded from religion and the marginalized, who feel in the message of Jesus the response to the desire for fullness of life that each person has within. As much as a person can live his existence in a wrong direction , no matter how much he is immersed in sin, there is always in him a desire for the fullness of life and happiness, which he has unfortunately often chosen incorrectly and has sunk into despair and pain. This desire is always awake so in Jesus there is the answer to this desire.

While Jesus is heard by tax collectors and sinners, the Pharisees, the pious ones, and the scribes, the official theologians “.. *grumbled, saying....*” It is interesting how in the Gospels the religious authorities, the spiritual masters, the scribes and the Pharisees, avoid pronouncing the name of Jesus. Jesus means "the Lord saves", and they do not need this salvation from the Lord and they always turn to him with a fairly crude and derogatory term, "this one, this man".

And here is the scandal, *“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”* Jesus does not only receive them but actually eats with them. To eat with means to share one’s own life. If one eats with an impure person, inevitably the impurity is transmitted to the other person. They did not understand that with Jesus sinners, unbelievers, and the impure, do not need to purify themselves to be worthy to eat with him, but it is the eating with him that purifies them. But the religious community do not understand this.

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

Jesus says, and takes it for granted: *“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 takes it for granted that the scribes and Pharisees consider this madness. No sane person leaves ninety-nine sheep in the desert at the mercy of animals and thieves, to go in search of one lost sheep without having the certainty of finding it. Well the logic of the world, which is the logic of convenience, is not the logic of Jesus.

Jesus’ logic is the one that is for the good of man. And therefore Jesus presents himself as this shepherd who abandons the ninety-nine and goes in search of the one who was lost. *“And when he has found it...”* The scribes and Pharisees would imagine that the protagonist would tie a rope

around its neck and, lead it into the fold, lock it in and never let it out again, scolding and punishing it . But in fact, when he found it, *"...he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."*

This lost sheep - in the Luke's gospel is an image of sin – it is treated better than the other ninety-nine. It is weak and the shepherd communicates his strength to it. Then he comes to have a relationship with the shepherd that none of the other ninety-nine sheep will have. In fact the shepherd puts it on his shoulders and transmits his joy.

"And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me,...'" But, while the shepherd in the parable invites others to rejoice, we see that here instead the scribes and Pharisees grumbled.

"..for I have found my sheep that was lost." This sheep will no longer be a sheep among others, but a sheep that has a special relationship with its shepherd. And Jesus continues: *"... I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents..."* This is why Jesus communicates life to sinners, because he knows that the strength of his word and the communication of his life, if accepted, they can leave the world of sin and transgression and give their life's to the project that God has always had for his creatures. *"Just so than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."*

Then there is the second parable that shows the delicacy of Jesus. Whenever he has to give examples, he always gives an example of the male, but now one of the female. Jesus does not forget the world of women, and if he first spoke of a man, the shepherd , here now the woman enters the scene. A woman who has ten coins and 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' reply "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 mumbles? The scribes and the Pharisees.

Here then is the third, which is addressed to the scribes and Pharisees, the eldest son is presented, the one who is represented, as a religious person who has always served his father, like a servant his lord, has always obeyed his commands , but precisely for this reason service and command did not make him understand the heart of the Father. So, while the Father rejoices for the return of the prodigal son *"...this my son was dead, and is alive again;"* the elder brother, instead of rejoicing, he who judges everything with the religious parameters of morality, is indignant, gets angry and it is he who does not want to enter the house.