

Luke 15:1-10

15 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. ³ And he spake this parable unto them, saying, ⁴ What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? ⁵ And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. ⁷ I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. ⁸ Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? ⁹ And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. ¹⁰ Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

The Pharisees and scribes had the idea of observing the letter of the Law outwardly, but did not understand the inner spirit of the Law. Therefore, they believed that in order to be considered a righteous person, one must not associate with or come in contact with sinners. Even today, there are church canons that prohibit praying with or eating with unbelievers, and from a moral perspective, one should not keep company with sinful people, since they might tempt us to sin as well. However, these publicans and sinners came to hear Christ. This was an act of repentance on their part, which is an entirely different matter. The Lord did not go into pagan temples and pray with idol worshippers, but He was willing to receive repentant sinners and eat with them. When one is repenting, one is not sinning, since to repent is to stop committing sins and try to do what is good and right.

There is an unfortunate idea today that if a person is a sinner, they should not come to church—that attending church is only for righteous people. As the Holy Fathers have said, that would be the same as saying that someone who is sick should not go to the doctor. If only people who were healthy went to the doctor, the doctors would all go out of business, since there would be nothing for them to treat, no medicine to prescribe. However, spiritually speaking, every single human being on earth is in a fallen state and is to one degree or another, a sinner who is in need of God's help and healing. St. Paul said in Romans 3:10-11 *“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:*

¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God;” and again in Romans 3:23 *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”*

When a Christian considers themselves to be righteous, they often begin to look at others as being sinful (as was the case in the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee). This is a big mistake and if one thinks this way, they imitate those Pharisees and scribes. More importantly, they miss the opportunity to repent and receive healing for their spiritual sickness which is caused by sin.

Notice how the Lord does not even condemn the Pharisees and scribes here. He could certainly see their many faults and how they were guilty of many sins that were just as bad as the publicans and sinners. They devoured what little the widows and orphans had, they found ways around supporting their aged parents, and it was they who plotted and ultimately caused the crucifixion of our Lord. Even though the Pharisees and scribes grumbled and slandered Jesus, He meekly tended to them, telling them the parable of the sheep to persuade them by what is clear and obvious, and to curb their vexation at His great outpouring of goodness. The Holy Fathers also point out that God the Father sent the Son from heaven, not to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

The Holy Fathers also see in this parable, an image of all the angels as God's rational creatures represented by the 99 and the one sheep that was lost as an image of fallen mankind. Some Holy Fathers also see the woman who lost the one coin, as an image of the Church who, illumined by the Light of Christ, finds the lost sinners and rejoices.

St. Nicholai Velimirovic says "...*Christ the Saviour came down from heaven to earth, to His house, and lit a candle, the light of the knowledge of Himself. He cleaned out the house – that is, He purified the world of diabolic impurity – and found the lost drachma: erring and lost humanity. Then He called His 'friends and neighbors' (after His glorious Resurrection and Ascension) that is to say, all the countless hosts of the Cherubim and Seraphim, Angels and Archangels, and revealed to them His great joy...That means: I have found men to fill the void in the Kingdom of Heaven caused by the fall of the proud angels who apostasized from God. At the end of time the number of those found and saved souls will have grown to billions, or in the language of Scripture, will be as countless as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. ...[this parable] confronts us with an urgent decision, because our life is swiftly passing- a decision as to whether we want to be the lost coin found by Christ or not. Christ is looking for us. Are we going to hide from Him or let ourselves be found by Him before death hides us from Him, from the world and from life? It is a vital question and it lies within our will to accept or reject Him. After death it will cease to be an open question, and then no one will expect an answer from us.*"