

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

St. Luke writes that “all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Jesus to hear Him.” In this there is great hope for you, and for all men. He deigned that those who were unworthy come to Him. Those soiled by their trespasses, those who were condemned by the Law, those who had no right to come into the presence of holiness, He welcomed. They came, St. Luke writes, to “hear Him.” For His Words were unlike the words of the scribes and the Pharisees.

They taught the Law as they had come to understand it. They rightly condemned sin. But their teaching offered no hope. His teaching was different than theirs. His teaching is Divine. He teaches only Truth. He too condemned sin. But He offered hope. He offered hope for sinners. He taught the fulness of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms and the Writings, for He is the center of all the Scriptures. He taught that God forgives sins.

He taught that God loves men. He taught that God loves even the sinner. And that soothing Gospel Word, that Word of reconciliation and salvation, that Word of Life brought hope and comfort to tax collectors and sinners, men aware of their sins, men convicted by the Law, men who knew that they could not save themselves. So at His teaching, at His Word of Truth, they grumbled, as had their fathers in the wilderness.

St. Peter writes the same Word of Comfort. He writes that the sinful man should cast all his cares upon God, for He cares for you. He is the God of grace, the God who calls fallen men to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus. He is the God who eats with tax collectors and sinners. He is the God that bids you come to Him.

But there is another at work in the world, the author of sin, the one who tempts and entices and lies. By deviousness he places sin before men and invites them to partake in it. He cannot cause men to sin, he does not have that power. He can only tempt. He knows what tempts you. His only power is the lie, to hold temptation out and seduce you, lure you to act. That’s how the sheep wanders off. That’s how the coin is lost.

That you be wise to the devil’s ways, St. Peter writes “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him...” The Chief of the Apostles calls on you to deny temptation, to say “No” to sin, to turn away from worldly lusts and allurements. And that you not think that you face such dangers alone, Peter writes “the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”

So, the Lord teaches, there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. That means that there is joy in heaven over you. Like a lost sheep, like a lost coin, you were unable to save yourself. Indeed, according to your flesh you preferred to be lost. But the Man who receives sinners and eats with them desired that you eat with Him, that you be fed from His Table.

You did not seek Him. You were lost. He sought you. He did it in love. The hireling would gladly let the one sheep perish to keep the 99. The hireling is concerned not with the individual sheep, but with maximizing the revenue from the flock. It is love alone that seeks the one lost. It is only the Good Shepherd that comes down from heaven, takes on Flesh, and seeks you. The hireling seeks his pay. The Good Shepherd pays for you. He goes out after you.

He came down from heaven to find you who did not seek Him. He took on Flesh to be one with you, to find you, to win you back. Before He put you on His shoulders in joy, His shoulders bore the chafing weight of the gibbet of the cross. It was there, on the cross, that He paid the price for your redemption. It was there, on the cross, that He gave His life that you might have life. It is there that He rescues you from the fatal dangers of the wilderness and brings you safely to His green pasture and His Living Waters.

By the Water and Blood that issued forth from His pierced, lifeless side, He gives life to the Holy Church. And it is she, the Holy Church, it is she who is the woman that lights the Lamp to search for the lost, the coin minted in the image and likeness of Christ.

He is the Light of the Gospel. And by that Light, by the Lamp of the Holy Gospel, by the Light of Christ working through His Church, your Lord finds you. That is the work of the Church: to bring the elect to saving faith through the Means of Grace, and to nourish and sustain you in that faith. For "...this Man receives sinners and eats with them."

So the Apostle writes that the God of all grace has called you to His eternal glory. St. Paul teaches that in that call you see your election. God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world, that you should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined you to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. It is that sheep, the elect; it is that coin, the predestined, that He seeks and finds.

The Apostle born out of due time teaches you why: He did it to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made you accepted in the Beloved. In Him you have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of your inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

In love He has sought you and found you. And this day He calls together His friends, those who have faith in Him, and bids you rejoice with Him. In His great love for you, it is not only tax collectors that draw nigh unto Him. He bids you rejoice with Him, to join Him in the Feast of Salvation.

He bids you eat the Holy Meal He serves His baptized, the Saving Supper He sets before those who have His Spirit. He bids you come to Him, that you may join in heavenly rejoicing, the rejoicing of the angels and archangels around His throne. So cast your cares upon Him, for He cares for you.

And so it is in you that the Words of Isaiah are fulfilled, for it is on this day that you can say "O Lord, I will praise You; though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and you comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid." For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst.

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