

We have listened to this very long passage we might have read in a shorter version, as the liturgy itself suggests. Yet, I have preferred to read it all because it is part of a chapter built by Saint Luke which puts together two more teachings we cannot find in the other synoptic Gospels; in particular the very famous parable of the lost son and the one of the lost coin.

All the three examples given by Jesus highlight and gently urge us to accept a truth which is very difficult for us to understand. **It is a truth implied in the question asked by the Scribes and which is the meaning of the whole passage;** because the examples offered by Jesus are simply an explanation of - and a reply to - this concern, to the question asked him by the scholars of Israel: *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."* Then Jesus told them this parable. Just to explain.

We only must try to put ourselves in Jesus' and his contemporaries' shoes.

Jesus came from a world that had known Moses' revelation, it was a religious world, a world of people striving to live the Covenant, and waiting for the arrival of the Messiah, the one who would deliver them from evil, the one who would deliver them from the Romans' tyranny – and more – to establish His Kingdom.

And this Jesus arrived!

An extraordinary man who started creating anxiety and concern in the people and in the religious chiefs of the time, i.e. the high priests, the Scribes... Because Jesus' teaching on one side was extraordinary – since it confirmed what He had promised and attracted crowds of disciples – on the other side, it disconcerted the religious tradition lived till that moment.

We might say that all this was a problem of the people of that time, what's it got to do with us?

But the disorientation Jesus caused in his listeners is the same disorientation we all feel today! And it is a disorientation showing our inability to understand and face God properly.

Why were the Pharisees and the Scribes scandalised by the fact that Jesus spent time with the sinners and even went looking for them?

Because **the frame of mind of the Jewish religion – like that of any other religion –** implies just the distinction between the sacred and the profane.

There is a context, an attitude, a way of being which is sacred, which, if practised, renders us closer to God; and then there is a profane, atheistic and sinful world, a way of being and living which estranges us from God.

Every man has to decide: if he wants to get closer to God, if he wants to please Him, he has to behave in a certain way. If he behaves differently, he will be refused and rejected by God.

So, if we think of it, the core is the attitude of man in front of God; it doesn't matter if you are a sinner, if you are weak and fragile, if you are unable or if you don't understand. Your situation doesn't matter; what matters is your capacity or incapacity to put into practice the word of God.

This frame of mind also implies a common attitude we all were instilled by our parents: if you are good, if you behave and make me happy, I'll reward you, if you misbehave I'll punish you.

This starts from childhood: at the primary school, if the pupil doesn't do his homework the teacher will punish him; then again, when he attends the secondary school, if he doesn't do his homework he will fail... So, this is the mentality.

We are called to carry out an action, a **performance**, for which we receive either approval or disapproval. And this happens in our relationships too: as soon as a person "makes a mistake", he/she is distanced and disapproved; if, on the contrary, he/she acts properly, he/she is approved.

We apply this frame of mind, our frame of mind, also to God.

So we think that if we act properly, God will love and cherish us; if we misbehave, so if we displease God, He will reject us.

Why did Jesus like those sinners, those prostitutes, those transgressors?

Why did Jesus choose to spend His time with them? Why doesn't He choose to call on us? We are so well-behaved, we pray, we offer the tithe...

We unconsciously live a religion which might be named a **performance religion.**

Our life, even the religious one, consists a series of performances we have to carry out.

But Jesus came to reverse this way of standing in front of God!

Jesus came to tell us that the Father loves us!

Not because we are good or wicked! He loves us because we are His creatures!

Jesus tells us that the Father has been looking for us - and for all men - for all the eternity because He would like everyone to be reconciled to Him. So He goes on trying with everyone, in different ways, He insists, He never distances anyone, He never rejects anyone. He hopes that, till we have life, we may understand His love and live on this love!

The religion of performance – the one in which there is either a reward or a punishment – does not have God at its centre, but an inner self, our inner self: I am good or I am wicked... I am the one who determines the relationship with God.

BUT IT IS THE CONTRARY!

God loves us and we must allow Him to love us.

Now, the three teachings, the three parables deal with this subject.

Who is that shepherd who, if he loses one of his one hundred sheep, doesn't care about it? Won't he go looking for it?

And about us: can we feel happy and satisfied if other men are sinners?

Saint Dominique prayed for the sinners, Saint Catherine prayed for the sinners... it is said that the saints don't sleep during the night, but pray for the sinners!

Since I was a novice, I have been worried about the fact I do not wake up at night to pray for the sinners. Why don't I have this fire which burnt in Saint Dominique?

Why do we sleep soundly?

Today we have attended the Holy Mass, we may have given to charity, we may have done a good deed, so we will go to bed calm and content and we will think we deserve who knows what...!

Why don't we feel this passion in our hearts?

Because we do not have God's charity. We have not experienced God's charity.

Like the boy who stayed home (in the parable of the two sons).

Saint Luke reinforces the message, because the teaching might have ended at the lost son's coming back home; the boy comes back, tells his father to treat him like one of his employees, but the father wants to celebrate because his son *was lost and is found*, the tale might have ended here.

On the contrary, Saint Luke goes on dealing with the second son, the one who had remained in the fields: why does he do it? Because he wants to make us understand the **we are all sinners, that all of us need God, in front of Him we are all ignorant!**

"Ignorant" because we do not know God's face, we do not know who God really is!

God is everlasting complete and constant love, God never stops looking for us...

The father of the parable loved both the son who had stayed home and the one who had gone away. **But none of them really knew his father.**

What prevented the elder son from celebrating? He had lived at home like a slave. Why in God's name did he do it?

The Christian revelation is first of all the revelation of the merciful face of God. A face of love, a Love that loves every man, that would like to gather all men round Him.

So we can truly accept Jesus' revelation only when we start understanding this love, and when we too start living with this love.

So let us avoid any type of judgment!

Let us avoid wasting our time judging the others: what they do, what they do not do, if they go to church, if they do not go to church, if they pray as we do, if they do not pray as we do....

Let us dedicate ourselves to loving God and to being loved by Him, let us become people who love the others, like Jesus, like Saint Dominique, like Saint Catherine, like Father Pius, like Saint

Francis...

This is the purpose and the role of the Christians in the world!

Not giving a good Sunday or daily performance...!

But allowing God's love to transform us.

So let us ask the Lord to rekindle our heart, since the world where we live does not need any brothers staying home judging the ones who are outside, but it needs loving and merciful faces, it needs to know the merciful face of our Heavenly Father.

Praised be Jesus Christ.