

+ J. M. J.

Take a moment to remember there was a reason that Jesus gave these three parables. Remember that tax collectors and sinners were coming to listen to Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, and in response Jesus taught these parables.

There is a theme of reconciliation that permeates each of the readings. In the first it was Moses interceding on behalf of the people when they worshiped a golden calf. The psalm is David's psalm asking for mercy after he sinned with Bathsheba. St. Paul reminds Timothy of God's mercy after he had persecuted the early Christians, and in the reading from the Gospel we hear the return of the prodigal Son.

That Jesus eats with sinners is great news. First of all Jesus was sent to reconcile humanity with God. In his very person he is God and man bringing together what was once separated due to sin. If we then in humility admit our sinfulness we have access to that forgiveness just as did the tax collectors and sinners. Scripture tells us "all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). To deny, ignore, or convince that we stand innocent before God is to carry about an attitude of the Pharisees and scribes, an attitude self-righteousness.

The story of the younger son tells us something important about the nature of sin. It is no accident that after self-indulgent lifestyle he finds himself amidst a famine and wanting the love of his father. Doesn't that in a way encapsulate sin? We fall into temptation something that we think we bring us temporary satisfaction when indeed we know it will not or it is wrong. The result eventually is a famine of lack of forgiveness toward another we love, anger, gossip, or broken fidelity. The happiness we once thought turns to misery, and just as this son was powerless to stop a famine we are powerless to get ourselves out of such a situation unless we do what the son did, return home.

The animosities or grudges we carry in life are not part of the kingdom, neither in this life or the next.

The Holy Spirit then will show us, if we allow, those people in our lives that we shun, the people in our

lives that we avoid or refuse to speak to, or the ways in which we have not been faithful in a relationship or in our vocation, marriage or other. The Holy Spirit leads us in this regard because just as the son realized there was something better as he observed the well-fed swine, the Holy Spirit will help us realize releasing our guilt and being free is much better than the shackles of sin we can find ourselves in.

We are constantly reminded God is so forgiving, so merciful, and so loving that he will always welcome us back, but we have a need as human beings for a certainty and that is why Jesus gives us the sacrament of reconciliation. We need to hear the words "I absolve you from your sin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" and know that at that instant our sins are wiped away with one hundred percent certainty. There is the risk that another person we have hurt will not forgive us; this is due to our fallen human condition. We can audibly hear that God forgives us and often that leads us to forgiveness of another kind; it can allow us to forgive ourselves

This evening we consider those stories of forgiveness we have heard proclaimed. As we pray as a community we look to the Holy Spirit to lead us back for each of us has strayed in some way. We also ask for the strength to return to the sacrament of reconciliation especially if we have not gone in a long time. It is true that Jesus came to reconcile sinners. Let's not keep him waiting for us any longer.

May God bless you.