The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS***ANGELUS***Saint Peter's Square
Sunday, 15 September
2019[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Today's Gospel passage (Lk 15:1-32) begins with several people criticizing Jesus, upon seeing him in the company of tax collectors and sinners, and they scornfully say: "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (v. 2). In reality, this statement turns out to be a marvelous announcement. Jesus *welcomes sinners and eats with them*. It is what happens to us at every Mass, in every Church: Jesus is happy to welcome us to his table where he offers himself for us. It is a statement that we could inscribe on Church doors: "Here Jesus welcomes sinners and invites them to his table". And in response to those who were criticizing him, Jesus tells three parables, three wonderful parables that reveal his preference for those who feel distant from him. Today, it would be nice if each of you would take up the Gospel, the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15, and read the three parables. They are wonderful.

The first parable says: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it?" (v. 4). *What man of you?* Not a person with good sense: he does the math and sacrifices the one to keep the ninety-nine. Whereas God does not give up. He cherishes precisely you who still do not know the beauty of his love; you who have not yet welcomed Jesus into the centre of your life; you who are unable to overcome your sin; you who, perhaps due to the bad things that have happened in your life, do not believe in love. In the second parable, you are that small coin that the Lord does not accept losing, and he searches relentlessly. He wants to tell you that you are precious in his eyes, that you are unique. No one can replace you in God's heart. You have a place; you are you, and no one can replace you; nor me, no one can replace me in God's heart. And in the third parable, God is the father who awaits the return of his prodigal son. God always awaits us. He does not tire, he does not lose heart. Because we, each one of us is that son embraced once again, that rediscovered coin, that sheep caressed and put back upon his

shoulder. He waits every day for us to perceive his love. And you say: “But I have done my share of things, I have done too much!”. Do not be afraid. God loves you; he loves you as you are and knows that his love alone can change your life.

But this infinite love of God for us sinners, which is the *heart of the Gospel*, can be rejected. It is what the elder son in the parable does. He does not understand love in that moment and he has in mind more of a master than a father. It is also a risk for us: to believe in a more rigorous than merciful god, a god who defeats evil with power rather than with forgiveness. It is not so. God saves with love, not with force: offering himself, not imposing himself. But the elder son, who does not accept the father’s mercy, withdraws; he makes a greater mistake. He thinks he is just; he presumes he has been betrayed and he judges everything on the basis of his concept of justice. Thus he becomes angry with his brother and rebukes the father: “You killed the fatted calf when this son of yours came” (cf. v. 30). *This son of yours*: he does not call him *my brother,* but rather, *your son*. He feels like an only child. We too are mistaken when we believe we are just, when we think the others are bad. Let us not think we are good, because on our own, without the help of God who is good, we do not know how to defeat evil. Today, do not forget to take up the Gospel and read the three parables of Luke, Chapter 15. It will do you good; it will be healthy for you.

How can we defeat evil? By welcoming God’s forgiveness and the forgiveness of our brothers and sisters. It happens each time we go to confession: there we receive the love of God, which conquers our sin. It no longer exists. God forgets it. When God forgives, he loses his memory, he forgets our sins, he forgets. God is so good to us! Unlike we who, after saying “it’s okay”, remember “with interest” the harm done to us, at the very first opportunity. No, God erases evil, he makes us new inside and thus enables joy to be reborn within us, not sadness, not darkness in our heart, not suspicion, but joy.

Brothers and sisters, take courage. With God, no sin has the last word. May Our Lady who unties the knots of life, free us from the presumption of believing we are just, and make us feel the need to go to the Lord who always awaits us to embrace us, to forgive us.

After the Marian Prayer, the Holy Father continued:

Dear brothers and sisters, last week a long awaited exchange of prisoners took place between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. I am happy for the people freed, who were able to once again embrace their dear ones, and I continue to pray for a swift end to the conflict and for lasting peace in Eastern Ukraine.

Yesterday in Forlì, Benedetta Bianchi Porro, who died in 1964 at just 28 years of age, was declared Blessed. Her whole life was marked by illness, and the Lord gave her the grace to bear it, indeed to transform it into a bright witness to faith and love. And today in Limburg, Germany, Fr

Riccardo Henkes, a Pallotine priest killed in hatred of the faith in Dachau in 1945, was declared Blessed. May the example of these courageous disciples of Christ also support our path to sanctity. A round of applause for the new Blesseds!

I warmly greet you all, people of Rome and pilgrims from various countries: families, parish groups and associations.

I greet the faithful from Honduras and Bolivia; the young African entrepreneurs committed to working together — *harambe* — for the future of Africa; and the electric car pilgrimage from Poland.

I greet the military gathered in memory of the Servant of God Fr Gianfranco Chiti; the Oblate Sisters of the Most Holy Redeemer; the faithful from Montecchio Emilia with the Venezuelan friends; and the confirmands from Crotone. I greet the group from unitalsi and I bless the great national pilgrimage to Lourdes which will take place in the coming days.

I wish everyone a happy Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci!*

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