



Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So, he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Introductory Prayer: Lord God, I believe that you are present here for this moment of prayer. Even if I have not really longed for this time together, I know that you have been waiting for me. As an expression of my gratitude and love, I truly wish to give myself totally to you during this meditation.

Petition: Lord, grant me greater zeal for the salvation of souls.

1. You Can Judge a Man by the Company He Keeps: . Our Lord took a considerable amount of flak from the Pharisees for taking time to get to know the less respectable crowd. In those days, "sinners" were marginalized and treated with contempt. Today, attitudes have changed. Folks that were considered sinners back then would now be mainstream; some of them would probably even be celebrities. But one thing is still the

same: People still judge others by the company they keep. For better or worse, people are judged by their associations. That brings up a good question. I am a Catholic. I receive the Eucharist frequently. Jesus is spending a lot of time with me. Would people be able to tell that I have been spending time with the Lord? What would they think of Christ and his influence on me? Are the Lord's standards reflected in my life?

2. The 99 Safe Sheep: . Jesus' description of going out to get the sinner is truly consoling. Perhaps this brings up a beautiful memory of how he came to my rescue, when I was one of the wooly ones wandering far from the flock. But that's now a changed scenario. I am in the flock. How do I stay here and keep from wandering off? The Good Shepherd gives us so many tools, but I need to use them. If I slacken in my prayer life and participate with routine and lack of fervor in the sacraments, I may find myself wondering what other pastures may be like. Let's focus on being faithful within the beautiful flock of the Church.

3. Fireworks in Heaven: Returning to the thought about people judging others based on the company they keep, we can easily see why those judgments occur: People that spend time together often start to become like each other, since they share many of the same interests. Jesus reveals in the parable what his driving, passionate interest is: the salvation of the individual soul. "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." The Lord is always looking to set off fireworks in heaven with one more conversion. If I'm hanging around Jesus enough, I'm probably starting to sound like him. If not, am I really spending as much time with him as I think? Am I trying to bring back the lost sheep that I know?

Conversation with Christ: Jesus, you lifted up the sinners around you — so many of them became saints. Let me soak up the grace of your divine influence so that I will truly reflect in my actions the reality of your work in my soul. Grant me a little portion of the burning desire you had to bring back the lost sheep.

Resolution: I will write a letter or email to a friend or relative who has drifted away from the Church, hoping that even a little "hello" may plant a positive seed.