

Vietnamese Martyrs Church

September 15, 2019

“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” This could be a compliment, but it is not. The Pharisees and the scribes carefully obeyed each of God’s commands. This is good. But they were also self-righteous and looked down on everyone else. They only sat at table with one another, not with public sinners! They did not recognize their brothers and sisters who were not like them.

Today’s parable is often called that of the Prodigal Son, only one of the three persons mentioned. The younger son did not know what it meant to be a son and thought it was only a matter of receiving his share of the inheritance. The father gives it to him, and the boy leaves home and immediately squanders everything until he is starving. Coming to his senses, he decides to return home and ask to serve as one of his father’s hired hands.

The father sees him at a distance, runs out and embraces him. At first, he does not seem to listen to the son’s confession and request but instead prepares a party for this son of his! Not a hired hand! The father loves his sons, both of them. God is like that. He loves each of us with an abiding, unconditional love.

The older son hears the sounds of the party and suspects what has happened. He refuses to join in the fiesta. His father comes out to invite him to participate. The older son says he has worked hard and been obedient. But when this prodigal son returns, the father rejoices. The father gently points out that he loves both sons and reminds the older one that his brother was lost but now is back.

When asked shortly after he was elected Pope how to describe himself, Pope Francis answered simply, but profoundly, “I am a sinner.” This was honesty, not a false humility. We are all sinners in need of God’s healing and forgiveness. We are all prodigals.

But we are also like the older brother who distinguish ourselves from “others, those people” – who speak a different language, come from a different culture or socio-economic status – or belong to a different political party. These also are our sisters and brothers, sons and daughters of the one God who loves all of us.

The Lord has invited us to sit at his table today, to listen to his word and receive his own Body and Blood. As disciples, we are challenged to reach out and bring others to the table, including those who are different from us. Our Lady, help us to be faithful disciples!