



*Saint Mark's Church
Sunday School*

The Lord accepting the sinners and the related parables

Code: 9/NT/2

1. General Aims of the unit

Better Understanding of the teachings of gospels and the basics of the spiritual life

2. Special aims of the lesson

1. Define the mission of Jesus Christ as the Lover of sinners who are rejected by the others
2. Explain in detail the 3 parables of accepting the sinners as mentioned in Luke 15: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. In each parable define the main characters and their role.
3. Highlight the joy, caused by the return of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, both in heaven and on earth. Let this joy be noticed by everyone in the class.
4. Interrelate all this with our return to our God through repentance and practiced in the sacrament of repentance and confession.

3. Outcomes

By the end of this lesson the teens are able to:

1. Remember by heart the symbols of the main characters in the parables: the shepherd, the lost sheep, the friends and neighbours, the woman who lost the coin, the coin itself, the father of the prodigal son, the son, the far country, the fields of swine, the older brother, the best robe, the ring, the sandals, the fatted calf and the big celebration.
2. Draw practical applications to these parables from the service of Jesus Christ during incarnation, the history of the church and contemporary stories of repentance.
3. Ensure the children are completely confident that when they go to confession there is no embarrassment in the presence of the priest as he is a symbol of Christ's love, and as Christ accepted the sinners with love they, as confession fathers, will listen and take the confessions with love and not judgment.

4. Verses:

John 3:16, Luke 15: 5, 7, 10, 18-24, 32

5. References:

1. The Orthodox Gospel – Ch. 15 St. Luke gospel
2. Any other commentary on the gospel of St. Luke
3. The Significance of Repentance – Fr Youseff Assaad

LESSON MATERIAL

A. Focus you-tube presentation

As a focus activity, you may like to show one (only one) of the following presentations:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f175o-HQgBw> ; or

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8UUP4DGoD0&feature=related> ; or

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pio7U51a93Q&feature=related>

B. Lesson

A possible way of beginning the lesson is by asking the children, "*Do you think that the Lord accepts sinners or not?*" The children may answer a theoretical, "Yes".

Ask them to prove their answer.

The student may answer you with an example of one of the parables, or another example, such as the right hand thief.

This could lead into the lesson. Parables which you may want to mention in the lesson include:

The two debtors: Luke: 36-50

(Found in the 2nd service of the Midnight prayer of the Agbia,

This story was told to Simon, in the presence of the "woman who was a sinner")

Brief overview/ contemplation

There were two debtors, one owed 500 denarii the other owed 50 denarii. And when they had nothing with which to repay he freely forgave them both.

There are 3 points to remember here:

(1) is that I'm a debtor

(2) There is no way I can pay this debt no matter how big or small it is ("they had nothing in which to repay".)

(3) Christ Freely forgave them both

Children in High school may be carrying a lot of guilt over a particular sin/s, perhaps to the extent they do not want to confess it. They may feel hopelessness in their spiritual life, to the extent that they feel they will never recover from it.

This is where we want to give hope.

A priest once said something very beautiful and hopeful, which can be related to this parable, and it goes something like this: "It doesn't matter if you're drowning in 5,000 meters of water or if you're

drowning in 50m of water, in the end your fate is the same. You'll never see the guy drowning in the deeper water say, oh' I wish I was only drowning in 50m of water, that's silly your if going to die anyway. Both of you still need to be saved. We all need God's grace and help. "The wages of sin is death". What's the difference whether I swore or robbed a bank? Indeed, we may classify one sin greater than another, but in the end isn't their fate the same?

The aim here is not to make the kids feel comfortable in their sin, but rather to let them acknowledge that we all need repentance and God's grace, no matter how big or small our sin is.

Activity to illustrate this point

Get two glass cups and fill them up with water one to the top and one only half full.

Place an object in one cup that will drown to the bottom (i.e. the sinner drowning in 5,000m of water (a lot of sins).

Then get another object and drop it in the other glass. This can represent the sinner drowning in 50m of water (not many sins).

Ask the kids *"in the end who wins, cup 1 or cup 2?"*

The point: we're all in the same boat; we've all got our own shortcomings. The one who repents is the one who wins, it doesn't matter how deep they were.

STORY – From book the Significance of Repentance by Fr Youseff Assaad

Once there was a priest who was told of a Christian woman living a life of prostitution. The priest found where she lived and went to visit her. When he entered the house he found the woman dressed in very inappropriate clothing, but asked her if he could sit and talk with her.

The woman agreed and sprawled herself out on the couch in front of Abouna, with total disregard to the priest sitting before her. Abouna was not bothered and began talking to her about the love of God and especially His love for sinners and how He agonises to have all His Lost sheep return, and how it hurts Him that even one of His flock is lost.

The woman listened but Abouna did not feel he had gotten anywhere with her. At the end Abouna requested they pray together. The woman said you can do what you want but I'm not going to pray, so Abouna stood and prayed in front of her while she stayed seated. When he finished he asked if he could come and talk to her again. The woman agreed.

On his return Abouna found exactly the same scene. The woman dressed inappropriately once again and when they sat down she sprawled herself out on the couch. But once again Abouna was not dissuaded but pushed on to speak to her and try and show her the love of Christ. When he finished he once again requested to pray and same as before she declined, but still agreed to see Abouna again.

This continued for a number of visits until one time when Abouna went to the door and found that she had dressed more appropriately and was the sign of the woman's first steps in repentance. With time she started sitting in a more respectful manner, and finally agreed to stand up and pray with Abouna. Over time the woman gave a full repentance and began reading the Bible and other spiritual books and also began being a regular at church and partaking of the communion.

It happened that this Abouna used to pick her up for church and one day he found that she was carrying a large bag with her. After getting in the car Abouna inquired about the bag, and the lady

explained that it was the money she had made in her life of sin and she wanted to donate it all to the church.

Abouna explained that the church could not accept any money gained from a evil means and apologised that the church could not accept it. The woman then asked what she should do with it and Abouna said that if she did not want it she should get rid of it. As they kept driving the woman asked Abouna to stop the car whilst they were on a bridge. The woman simply got out took the bag of money and threw it off the bridge. She then got back into the car and told Abouna to keep going so they weren't late for church.

When one truly repents with all their heart there is nothing that is too valuable to give up for the Lord.

Other parables include:

- ***Lost sheep:*** Christ leaves the rest and searches for me as though I'm the only one that matters. Luke 15:1-10
- ***Lost piece of money:*** a lot of effort went into finding this coin. i.e. lighting the lamp, sweeping the house and searching for the coin. Luke 15:8-10.
- ***The prodigal son:*** Luke 15:11-32. A beautiful point a priest made was this. "The son never needed to beg for mercy but it was a given." (" And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." Luke15: 20.)

Had the son misunderstood what his father was like he may have never come back, and remained living like a pig for the rest of his life.

It seems as though the father forgave the son before he saw him. It is very much like forgiveness was a given, but it could only be given when the son came back.

- ***Pharisees and the Publican:*** Luke 18:9-14 (Christ justifies those who know they are sinners).

Christ died on the cross for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8), He did not wait for every single person to come to Him and ask and plead for it. He's already offered His forgiveness, but it is only accepted if we choose to accept it. It is not a matter of begging as much as it is simply us accepting it.

Conclusion.

It is an understatement to say that the Lord merely "accepts" sinners. Rather it is a great joy to Our Heavenly Father for us to come back. St. John writes "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth". (3 John:1-4). Now if St. John writes this, and he had a limited amount of love, how much more so would Christ rejoice at the return of a sinner, for He is the definition of Love.

The Lord does not merely accept us, but He searches for us (i.e. lost sheep parable). Was this not the sole purpose He came to earth? "I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners, to repentance." (Luke 5:32)

Christ died for us. This is the depth of His love for us. He wants us, and reaches out to us.

When we return to Him, He is truly happy in the return of His children. There will be much celebration, and we will be blessed with many of His gifts and His grace which He will give to us (just like the feast and the celebration with the return of the prodigal son). Indeed it is not hard to imagine it like a party which takes place in Heaven with a great feast whenever a sinner repents "... There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

There is no doubt that Christ accepts sinners. The real question is whether or not we accept Christ? Do we turn to Him for all things whether big or small, all issues and problems whether big or trivial? Especially do we turn to Him whenever we fall, and ask for Him to accept us, and give us the strength to stay united to Him?

What's stopping us from accepting Christ? Do we make the most of His great love for us, as otherwise we are saying to Him that His crucifixion (which was for no other reason than His deep love for us) was in vain. Things that may be obstacles for us to truly appreciate His love for us are: not being honest with ourselves (that we are sinning), not repenting, not praying, and not participating in Communion with Him.

May our Lord God help us to turn to Him and to love Him, as He is always ready to accept us.

Glory be to God, forever. Amen.

FURTHER RESOURCES

For additional material, you may wish to supplement your knowledge with more resources on repentance at the following link:

http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/thecopticchurch/sacraments/3_repentance_confession.html