



# Boston Catholic Journal

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## A Case of Mistaken Identity



Meanwhile tax collectors and sinners were seeking the company of Jesus, all of them eager to hear what he had to say. But the Pharisees and the Scribes frowned at this, muttering. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them". (Saint Luke 15.2)

Again we encounter the hypocritical judgments of the Pharisees and the Scribes in today's Gospel reading.

Their attitude is the complete opposite to that of Jesus. Their reaction to the presence of so-called sinners and tax collectors was judgment that *condemned*; Jesus' attitude was one of love that *redeemed*.

In Jesus' time a "sinner" was one who was not within the Covenant, a pagan who did not observe God's will, particularly as expressed in the Law.

The tax collector was despised and equated with public sinners because of his link with the pagan occupying power and his frequent extortion. Because of this he was kept at a distance by every Jewish observer of the Law.

The Pharisees and Scribes self-righteously condemned the tax collectors and sinners, looking only at the externals, because indeed, the externals were all that they could ever hope to perceive.

*Had they truly been men of prayer they would have seen into the hearts of men.*

Jesus could see into the souls of these "sinners," whose real sin was that of greed, an idolatry of wealth and money. He saw them as people to be liberated, redeemed, people to be called away from false idols to the worship of His Father.

His knowledge of man was *liberating*, the Pharisees knowledge was *binding*.

There is a great lesson in all this: *Our learning should always be at the service of love*, without a practical application, learning can be useless and dead.

It is also very humbling to accept that often those "outside" of religious practice, the so-called pagans, are often more receptive to Gods Word and assenting to Truth than we are.

A Poor Clare Colettine Nun



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