

“This man welcomes sinners.”

- *Luke 15:2*

The scribes and Pharisees intend this statement to be a condemnation of Jesus. Their sensibilities and theology are scandalized that Jesus is speaking to sinners and tax collectors. They believe that God punishes sinners; that God does not welcome sinners. Many who were schooled in a similar way believe that God punishes sinners and welcomes the good and the perfect, but this logic is not the *Good News* that reveals God.

Jesus demonstrates an alternative way of seeing and responding to sinners. He welcomes them as an alternative to blaming, judging or punishing them. Jesus sees sinfulness as a condition of their lives, where infirmity and poverty are considered signs of sin. For extending a welcome, he is criticized by the scribes and the Pharisees. Today, when we speak of the poor and vulnerable, we are speaking about those who live with these same conditions.

To welcome someone also means to show them hospitality, an action which includes elements of warmth, kindness, courtesy and generosity. The word *hospital* is contained in and shares the same root meaning with the word *hospitality*. It is a place of welcome where we bring in the poor and vulnerable, the sick and the suffering, and in return, we give them warmth, kindness, courtesy and generosity. These are matters of the heart ... the heart of God. When we welcome the poor and vulnerable we manifest the mission of Jesus.

Being welcoming is hard work because of the depth of interior work it requires of us and what it calls us to be. It is often easier to be coldly efficient. But efficiency is no substitute for being warm and welcoming. Consider these questions:

Are our hospitals places of *hospitality* where we welcome and are welcomed?

How do I welcome poor and vulnerable persons who appear to me as associates as well as patients?