

**June 8 – Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
*Prepared by Fr. John McAuley, MM*

**Readings:** Hosea 6:3-6; Psalm 50:1, 8, 12-13, 14-15; Romans 4:18-25; Matthew-13

The question is raised in the Gospel of Matthew: why does Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners?

Tax collectors were local people who cooperated with those outsiders with bloodied hands who were occupying, oppressing and exploiting the tax collectors' very own people. In more contemporary terms, the feeling that the Pharisees had for Jesus' fraternizing with tax collectors would not be too different from the feelings many of us in the U.S. would have if we were to learn that a well know U.S. American personality regularly gave public support and credibility to those who plan and carry out terrorist initiatives such as were perpetrated on September 11, 2001.

"Sinners," in Jesus' time, were those who either habitually or publicly lived lives that perpetrated, supported or condoned acts and conditions that appeared contrary to the Scriptures and Torah. In our times, such public sinning is an issue that is gaining increasing attention and discussion.

So, why did Jesus publicly eat with such persons as tax collectors and sinners?

It is not an answer to the question, but it may be of some consolation to us that Jesus did so. For we are, all of us, sinners. Every one of us has some incident or some thing in our life, no matter how large or small, that we would not want published on the front page of our local newspaper. But as embarrassed as we would be, or as judged as we might be by others, Jesus apparently would not shy from our continued company.

But still, the fact that Jesus publicly ate with such persons as tax collectors and sinners causes us as much confusion as it did the Pharisees; themselves very religious persons seeking the right and the good in their lives and for their society. Why am I struggling to live a good, decent life for myself, for my family, for my community of faith and for society, when those who flaunt such values gain public profile and credibility by Jesus' company with them?

Raising those questions, it becomes clearer that we may be less focused on Jesus' motivation for his accompaniment of such persons, and are instead centered on a perceived consequence of his accompaniment of sinners, and then giving that perceived consequence a less than positive interpretation, based on our struggle to differentiate ourselves from evil, ungodliness, and the power and effects of sin. In fact, Jesus of the lost sheep, Jesus of the lost coin, Jesus of the prodigal, Jesus betrayed by Peter, may have been accepting of others simply because he experienced that his Father was accepting of their being and ongoing life among us. Maybe it was as simple as that: Jesus accepted them because he was doing what he saw his Father doing: accepting them in so far as their life was sustained by Him as our life is sustained.

This may be hard to embrace when acceptance means acceptance of those whose faults are evident. But what if the situation were changed and involved, not the acceptance of an undesirable person, but the acceptance of an innocent person, who because of rules and practices that usually promote the common good, find themselves rejected to the point of negating their very being and their rights as fellow citizens.

While in Japan I made the acquaintance of a missionary family from Singapore. The husband, wife and their son entered Japan legally, and while there, gave birth to their

daughter. Japan does not grant citizenship to those born within her borders of non-Japanese parents. So the girl had no claim on Japanese citizenship. Additionally, though her mother was a citizen of Singapore, according to Singaporean law, citizenship is granted through the father. So the girl had no claim to Singaporean citizenship through her mother. Finally, though her father was a citizen of Singapore, he received his citizenship as a result of being born in a section of Malaysia that was once part of Singapore, but now no longer is. So the father was a legal citizen of Singapore, but could not pass on citizenship to his daughter because both he and his daughter were born outside the borders of what now constitutes Singapore. So the girl had no claim to Singaporean citizenship through her father. The girl was declared stateless and without any legal standing. Rules that normally protect and promote the common good became an insurmountable obstacle even for people of goodwill to “accept” this child as one of us. It took a special act of the Singaporean government eight years later before she was recognized as a legal person.

An article in the April 12, 2008 edition of the *New York Times* speaks of over 86,000 people in the U.S. in the year 2007 who had previously entered the U.S. legally and remained legally in the U.S. for many years. They had built public, legitimate lives and careers, and were raising families with U.S. American citizen children. All 86,000 could have remained legally in the U.S. indefinitely, but because of issues related to the national debate of the acceptance and the place of non-citizens, they decided to apply for citizenship. The *Times* reported that these particular 86,000 people were individually denied eligibility for citizenship on one or more technicalities and were subsequently forced to leave the U.S., effecting a large scale dislocation of U.S. American children who would otherwise be protected by citizenship from the effects of such “unintended” deportations. Again, rules and regulations that normally protect and promote the common good became insurmountable obstacles even for people of goodwill to find acceptance and protection of the place of these U.S. American children and their parents among us.

The tax collectors and the sinners of Jesus’ day were denied civil standing and a place in the community of faith. Jesus perceived that the Father, his Father and our Father, allowed them an ongoing place in life among us, and so Jesus acted accordingly, in a manner that was not fully understood in his day, and still not fully appreciated and emulated in ours.

### **For more information:**

Read more about promoting the common good in an election year in Maryknoll’s “Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world,” a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:  
[www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: *Peace, Social Justice & Integrity of Creation*  
P.O. Box 29132 Washington, D.C. 20017  
phone: (202)832-1780 fax: (202)832-5195  
[ogc@maryknoll.org](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org) [www.maryknollogc.org](http://www.maryknollogc.org)