

## Bring Back the Latin

“Bring back the Latin Mass” has been a rallying cry for conservative Catholics for over 40 years. The secular classical education movement has gone back to teaching Latin usually with the idea that knowing Latin will make nobler people. These need to read the poets and authors educated in Oxford, Cambridge, Yale, Harvard in the 20s and 30s. They were fluent in Latin which meant they knew how to be profane and vulgar in 2 languages. I don’t know Latin. I’m familiar with some well-known theological Latin phrases. I appreciate how memorable and vivid they are. I say bring back the Latin to appreciate anew our too familiar text.

Our text is the epitome of the Gospel. Epitome is really a Latinized Greek word. An epitome is a summary. Luther said this text was an epitome of the Gospel itself. He said this appointed reading “contains the teaching we hold and boast of as our chief doctrine, which is called the true Christian teaching, namely the doctrine of grace and forgiveness of sins, and Christian liberty from the law” (*Sermon notes*, 1). The sheep loses itself. The coin can’t help itself be found. But the Jesus figure goes looking. “The rabbis agreed that God would welcome the penitent sinner. But it was a new idea that God is seeking a God, a God who takes the initiative” (*Morris*, in *Buls Exegetical C after Pentecost*, 57). This is Francis Thompson 19<sup>th</sup> century poem, “Hound of Heaven.” “Hound” is only found in the title yet I can hear the dogs baying as they pursue the lost soul. Only this ‘Hound’ pursues to save.

The truth one confesses is always sweeter and stronger in the mouths of enemies. What better summary of the Gospel can be found than in the grumbling words of Pharisees and Teachers of the Law? “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” They spit these words yet they are the truth: Jesus calls sinners “Just as They Are Without One Plea.” Washing them in His holy blood, cleansing them in the Waters of Baptism, and then eating with them at this Table. But, for Lutherans, not only the Lord’s Supper is with Jesus, but every meal is. Although it started with the Moravians in 1753, “Come Lord Jesus” had become the common table prayer for Lutherans ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common\\_table\\_prayer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_table_prayer)) by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. “The 19th-century German artist, Fritz von Uhde, a devout Lutheran, made a painting of this prayer. It shows an ordinary peasant family sitting around a table and then Jesus walks in. They stand to greet Him, with bows and shy looks, as they would with any guest. Jesus, the Lord of the universe, has come to this humble family to be with them” ([witness.lcms.org/2021/come-lord-jesus/](https://witness.lcms.org/2021/come-lord-jesus/)).

Behind the Epitome of the Gospel where the Lost Coin and Lost Sheep are found is the Lamb of God taking on flesh and blood in the womb of the Virgin. The Lamb publicly takes responsibility for our lostness. He in fact publicly takes on the sins of the world and proceeds to carry them to the cross. See them going away from you; feel them coming off you. And with that burden which no one can really imagine, He goes on to lead a holy life. That evil thought you had He never had. That sinful word you spoke, He never uttered. That bad deed, that evil deed, that thoroughly wicked act you did yesterday or decades ago, Jesus never did. But He was tortured, damned, and died as if He had. The Father accepted that sacrifice and so the sinless Lamb who is your Good Shepherd was risen from the dead, and not only able to eat with sinners but to give sinners like us His Body and Blood to eat His forgiveness, His life, His eternity.

All of this is in here and 2 more Latin phrases can spring them to life for you. *A maiore ad minus*. Hear major and minor? It’s an argument from the lesser to the greater. The parables assume that the average man or woman would look for what is lost, rejoice in what is found, and assume not just friends but neighbors would rejoice with them. This male-female emphasis is strange, but deliberate, and I’m not sure what to make of it. The pair of parables differ primarily in each presenting either all male or all female characters. The searcher, friends, and neighbors in the first are all masculine and in the second all feminine (Tannehill, 237).

We just hear this distinction in the words male/female and pronouns. One who knows Greek would hear it throughout. It could be to emphasize the truths portrayed by the parables are universal. If sinful fallen people can’t give up for lost 1% of their livestock or 10% of their money, how much more can the holy, righteous Lord give up lost souls? Not 1% of them, not 10% of them, not 99% of them but 100% are lost and not just temporally but eternally. The sheep would’ve died temporally not eternally. The lost coin wouldn’t even know it’s lost, but the damned in hell do. I’ve seen people caught in the terrors of hell. You can’t fake it. You can’t make yourself have those terrors. You know how they tell you be careful rescuing a drowning man because in their desperation they will pull you under with superhuman strength? It’s like that. It’s frightening. I’ve seen hell’s terrors in a man 103 years old, a young man in his 20s, and a woman in her 40s.

And as even a sinful shepherd will do the crazy thing of leaving 99 for 1 and a fallen woman will not be content with 9/10<sup>th</sup> of her monies, so the Holy God misses even 1. Much ink is spilled in commentators about the 99 being repentant or needing no repentance, i.e. already saved. And whether the 99 are indeed lost to perish in the wilderness or already in the fold. Here’s Luther’s take: “The learned and the idle may determine the meaning of the ninety-nine in the desert. It is

enough for us to learn the main thought of this Gospel” (*Sermon Notes*, v. 7). And this is: that God in Christ is looking for you even when you’re not looking for him or can’t. Every Gospel word printed, preached, spoken to you says, “I’m looking for you.” “You burdened and heavy laden; I’m looking to carry that load.” “You dirty and diseased by sin, I’m here to wash you in forgiveness and heal you with holiness.” Go home watch a YouTube baying hounds video. Not dogs barking, but the distinct noise they make when they’re on something. The Hound is Jesus and you’re the one he’s baying after day and night and it goes on till Death ends the chase one way or the other.

Latin knows an argument from lesser to greater and it knows one from greater to lesser. “*A fortiori*” literally means from the stronger. Our word ‘fort’ comes from this Latin word. There’s more joy in heaven over one penitent sinner than 99 impenitent or already in heaven. The angels rejoice over one sinner who repents. Before you think it’s about something in the sheep or coin that leads to repentance. *Nota bene*, Note well: so little is repentance a human action preparing for God’s grace that it is placed on the same level as a sheep or a coin being found and a coin. Neither do anything to prompt the search except be lost. Second, what makes angels sing? Creation (Job 38:7); Incarnation (Lk 2:13-17), and Recreation (Lk 15:7,10). Bernard said that the tears of penitents is the wine of angels and Luther said their conversion causes the *Te Deum*, like we sing, among the heavenly host. (*Trench*, 388). The word for that joy in heaven over one found sinner is the same word in John (16:21) for a woman after giving birth forgetting her pain for joy that a child is born.

From the fortress of heaven itself which rejoices not over thousands repenting, not over miracles, not over displays of God’s power but one sinner repenting, how much does this little house of God rejoice? We are the objects of God’s salvation. We are the reason He sent His only Son into flesh and to the suffering and dying and damning of the cross. We are the reason the Son gives us Water to cleanse us, Words to relieve us, and His very Body and Blood to refresh us as *viaticum* Provision for our Journey to heaven. How much more should we rejoice that another fellow sinner like us has been found by these gifts? To *not* do so would be as unnatural as not rejoicing with your friend or even a neighbor who finds his lost sheep or her lost coin.

If you follow strict rules for interpreting parables, that’s the point of comparison right there. It’s not, ‘Get out there and find lost sheep or lost coins’, but not only how unnatural the grumbling of Jesus’ enemies is, but how ungodly. They don’t do what God Himself does. The text says when they saw the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ all gathering around to hear Jesus, they grumbled. “He welcomes them and even ~~eats~~ with them.” Then the text says, “Jesus told them this parable.” What is unnatural for fallen men and women to do, to complain about the lost being found, is what His enemies are doing. See where each parable stops? With the One who finds saying, “Rejoice with me because I have found...”? There’s no thought that the Finder is going to be met with grumbling.

It’s Superman Bizarro World where that happens, and that’s the thought to take home. When the Devil, the World, or your own Flesh doubt that God in Christ actively seeks the lost today or that He doesn’t rejoice over finding you, the sinner, that may feel right to Devil, World, and Flesh. But that’s really God’s Bizarro World. God’s reality is opposite the fallen world’s. He rejoices at what enemies grumble over. He actively seeks His prey not to kill them but save them. His hounds are neither silent nor listless. This is a good place to stop our Latin ‘lesson’ with *reductio ad absurdum*.

This is reducing an argument to absurdity. It is absurd to think anyone would grumble over the lost being found. Simple rules of etiquette or politeness would dictate you not grumble at your neighbor finding what he lost. And the Gospel is most certainly absurd in that depicts the Lord going after lost sinners at the expense of the 99% or the 90%. But He did more than that. He went after us 1% at the expense of His only beloved Son. No one who’s been found after being hopelessly lost by their own fault and found at such a costly sacrifice by God Himself, would grumble over other lost people being found too. That would be absurd. But Jesus goes one better. He goes on to tell another parable about 2 lost sons in an effort to find these grumblers. Amen

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Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (20221002); Luke 15:1-10