

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Ezekiel 18:25-28](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130](#)

[Reading II: Philippians 2:1-11 or 2:1-5](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/100123.cfm>



Ezekiel is ministering at the close of the Babylonian exile. While Israel was a kingdom, the sense of responsibility was a community duty. If there was suffering, it was the community's duty to repent. The pain and suffering fell upon the community (e.g. "punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation" in the Decalogue [Ex 20:5]) Those who were in exile had grown up in exile. They are complaining that they were not the ones who sinned and are angry that God has left them in exile. Ezekiel responds that God is not unfair. God deals with each person individually. Hence, a person who has made good choices can turn and make sinful ones. The person who has made sinful choices can change and make good choices.

The destruction of Israel's national institutions during the Exile brought forth a new emphasis on individual and personal responsibility. Ezekiel affirms and emphasizes this shift.

In the verses leading up to our Gospel passage, Jesus has gone to Jerusalem and is challenged by the chief priests and elders. "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?" (Matt 21:23) They are referring to Jesus cleansing the temple and healing the sick. Jesus responds to them with his questions. "Where was John's baptism from? Was it of heavenly or human origin? (Matt 21: 25) They feel caught because either answer has implications for them and they will be shamed. If they say John's baptism was from God, then they will be challenged as to why they did not respond to it as the sinners did. If they say John's baptism was not from God, then they will offend the common people who may then turn on them.

Jesus then tells the parable of the man with two sons. One son says no but does what the father asks. The other says yes, but never does what was asked.

In the close quarters of life in Ancient Israel, everyone heard conversations. Neighbors and passersby would hear a father instructing or directing his sons. Honor demanded that the son reply yes to a father's request. To deny a father's directive or order would expose him to ridicule in the town. The proper thing to do is to say yes even if you did not plan to follow through on it.

Jesus puts the focus on who does the will of the father rather than who honors the father. This is a different orientation than was expected in first-century Judea. It is more compatible with our contemporary focus on action rather than on relationship.

Jesus makes his message explicit in identifying those who said no to God but after hearing John the Baptist, changed their behavior. Although they were living in ways that were contrary to God's word, upon hearing the Word changed. Jesus likens the Pharisees to those who say yes and have all the right words, but do not live the heart of God's Word.

Last Sunday's passage from the letter to the Philippians ended with "conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ." (Phil 1:27) In the passage this week, Paul presents Jesus as an example of how to do this. He is the example of an ethical life that should be the ideal to which all Christians strive.

"Being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others." (Phil 2: 2-4)

Unity of mind and having love for others is a very great challenge. Everyone has thoughts about what is most important. Striving to find a common good is hard. Paul calls Christians to not act out of selfishness nor to seek glory and the attention of others. This runs against many of the assumptions presented by society. To live like this requires full and complete trust in God. God will be there to see me through each challenge and struggle that comes along. Jesus entrusted himself to God, even when facing death. It also requires that one be firmly rooted in Gospel values. These values are not just ideas but principles that must be integrated into one's deepest self.

Paul then quotes an ancient Christian hymn that presents the way Jesus lived. It touches upon both his incarnation (becoming human) and his death and glorification. Jesus was consistent throughout the whole of his life's journey. This hymn is also read on Palm Sunday of each year to give perspective to Christ's crucifixion.

Themes:

Conversion and Repentance
Catholic Social Teaching

Individual vs. Corporate Responsibility
Humanity and Divinity of Jesus

Reflection Questions:

Has the question of fairness impacted your relationship with God?

Can you identify moments in your life that connect with one or the other son in the parable?

Read over the passage from Paul slowly and carefully. What words or images stand out for you?

Who in your life has placed your interests before their interests? How have you placed the concerns of others before your interests?

Suggestions for Prayer:

For the Church: that we may more and more put on the attitude of Christ and empty ourselves so that God can raise us to a new life of faithful relationships and loving service

For the grace of conversion: that God will help all who have made poor or destructive choices to change course and follow Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life

For healing of our attitudes: that God will free us from selfishness and the desire to control and help us to strive to serve others with love, patience, and humility

For the unity of Christians: that all believers may be of one mind and heart and work together in serving God and confronting evil