



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

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'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not, 'but afterwards changed his mind and went. Matt 21:29

We might well consider this gospel parable of the Two Sons an effective tool to awaken us to unacknowledged aspects of our own identity by instilling a growing discomfort regarding the human tendency toward self-righteousness. It is clear that Jesus was often criticized for consorting with those who were deemed socially unacceptable. Further, his "guilt by association" was the perfect excuse not to believe his teaching. The chief priests and elders, as leaders of the people, were excoriated more than once by Jesus for finding reasons to resist God's revelation. Jesus even says that such rejection is a habit with them, and had been throughout Israel's history.

Today's parable clearly points out that the choice to believe that Jesus Christ is "*the Way, the Truth and the Life*" see *John 14:6*, may come late, or even after a life of sin, but that such a choice is infinitely better than living a lie. To say we believe and then behave as if we don't is the worst kind of hypocrisy. Likewise, to think that we can easily distinguish believers from non-believers is a devastating mistake. Many times the "scribes and Pharisees" among us deem as unworthy of "their" Church those that repent after a life of sin and dissipation.

This parable of the Two Sons offers us a rich opportunity for reflection this week. It exposes the chronic tension in the human condition between saying and doing, appearance and reality, intention and action, giving us the gift of the gradual process of spiritual growth along the Pilgrim's Way of the Cross. At some point in our life, whether early or late in coming, we hopefully are granted the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit of *metanoia*, the ultimate moment of change of heart in our way of life resulting from a deep call to penitence and spiritual conversion where we are moved by repentance.

As Christians we are called to practice the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, bury the dead, shelter the homeless and visit the imprisoned. As we practice these marvelous works, we actually are the beneficiaries of grace, changing our stony hearts into the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and we take on Christ's heart as our own. This leads us to outpour grace, whether to the sinner sitting in a jail cell, or the person connected to our Church Community. Our prayer, "Give me the heart and mind of Jesus," will be answered as our spiritual eyes are open to the holy potential of all souls created in the Image of God.

The core question of this parable appears to be "doing the will of our Father," both on earth and in heaven. But how sweet the countenance of the Father as he sees us draw toward him with the heart-felt desire to be His coworkers in the vineyard. How delicious the wine of this harvest will taste, aged in the cask of loving repentance, ready forgiveness, and eternal communion.

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people:

"What is your opinion?

A man had two sons.

He came to the first and said,

'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.'

He said in reply, 'I will not,'

but afterwards changed his mind and went.

The man came to the other son and gave the same order.

He said in reply, 'Yes, sir, 'but did not go.

Which of the two did his father's will?"

They answered, "The first."

Jesus said to them,

"Amen, I say to you,

tax collectors and prostitutes

are entering the kingdom of God before you.

When John came to you in the way of righteousness,

you did not believe him;

but tax collectors and prostitutes did.

Yet even when you saw that,

you did not later change your minds and believe him."

The Gospel of the Lord