



Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 28, 2014 A

A 'NO' THAT BECOMES A 'YES' AND A 'YES' THAT BECOMES A 'NO'

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells this parable:

What do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not,' but later he changed his mind and went.

The father went to the second and said the same. He said in reply, 'I will go, sir,' but he did not go.

Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first."

The following reflection on today's Gospel is by Fr. Dennis McBride.

One of the interesting points that emerges from the Gospel is how Jesus does so much of his teaching through storytelling. Paradoxically, Jesus communicates his most telling truths through the medium of fiction. He invites his hearers to use their imagination and follow him into the world of parable. The truth of Jesus' parables does not depend on whether the tales told actually happened—that is not their claim on the hearer; rather, their claim to truth depends on whether they catch something of the unseen reality of the kingdom, or whether they disclose unrecognized truths about people's commitment to God and their relationship with each other.

In the parable we are invited to enter a visual world of dinner parties, sheepfolds, vineyards, welcome households, threatening journeys; a world peopled by rich merchants, mugged travelers, callous judges, awkward neighbours, selfish hosts, good employers, searching housewives, broken families, warring kings, surprised guests, wise and foolish bridesmaids. The point of the parables is not that they make interesting illustrations; the stories tell us it is at the level of our eating, drinking, sleeping, forgiving, choosing, reaching out, journeying, noticing people, answering doors, offering hospitality, sharing bread and listening to midnight stories that our happiness and salvation are being worked out.

In Jesus' parables there is a marked absence of the supernatural; Jesus baptizes the ordinary and tells us

that it is in the theatre of the ordinary that the drama of the kingdom is lived out. By evoking everyday experience, the parables tell us that we are saved where we are. In the parables we are invited to make a judgment and to come to a decision; they invite us to pay attention, come alive and face things.

Promise and performance

*All this can be seen in today's Gospel where Jesus confronts the chief priests and elders of the people. He confronts them with a story, a parable which criticizes them for being "yes-men" whose easy promises are not matched by their performance. Fiction is used to face this problem of religious deception. The story is told of a man who has two sons and who asks them both to work in the vineyard. The first son refuses bluntly, "I will not go," but afterwards regrets his decision and changes his mind. The second son agrees politely and readily. "Certainly, sir," but his instant consent is not matched by his behavior: he doesn't turn up. Jesus' question, "Which of them did the father's will?" only allows for one answer. Only one son **did** anything.*

Jesus' own reply identifies the two sons. The son who refused but repented stands for the tax collectors and prostitutes who complied with God's requests set forth in the Baptist's preaching. The other son stands for the priests and scribes who maintain the outward appearance of piety but without any real devotion to the will of God. They did not trust the Baptist, even when they saw the testimony of the changed lives of the tax collectors and prostitutes. Their outward piety, unsupported by obedience to God, is criticized earlier in the Gospel, when Jesus says: "It is not those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord,' who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven." (7:12)

"Late have I loved Thee"

*The son whose word was 'no' but whose actions became 'yes' is held out to us as the one who did his father's will. The story doesn't tell us why he changed his mind or what the change cost him, only that this generosity of spirit had the last word. In time he caught up with the best that was in him. **He was late in doing his father's will, but not too late.***

That son had a real counterpart in St. Augustine, whose early life was a blunt refusal to follow the Gospel his mother had held out to him. In his **Confessions** he admits his sexual exploits—from the age of seventeen he had a mistress who bore him a son. The Gospels he regarded as fit only for simple minds; he hunted elsewhere for truth. In time—when he was thirty-two—he caught up with the best in himself and his ‘no’ turned into a committed ‘yes.’ The son who eventually said ‘yes’ reflected on his late decision when he wrote:

"Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved Thee!... Thou didst call and cry out and burst in upon my deafness; Thou didst shine forth and glow and drive away my blindness; Thou didst send forth Thy fragrance, and I drew in my breath, and now I pant for Thee; I have tasted, and now I hunger and thirst; Thou didst touch me, and I was inflamed with desire for Thy peace."

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Is there a danger our ‘yes’ could become a ‘no’?

All of us have at some stage said ‘yes’ to God. Our ‘yes’ may have been a strong or not so strong one. Is there a danger that, while on the surface we may seem to be still saying ‘yes’ to God, on a deeper level our ‘yes’ may be weakening and going cold? I think that this is a distinct possibility. What might be signs of a weakening ‘yes’?

· Prayer gets neglected or becomes very routine. We say prayers but don’t really pray. We don’t open our hearts to God. We don’t seek his will when it comes to decisions.

· Our lives become self-centered. The Christian life is *not* about us. It is about seeking God and his will. It is about sharing our gifts of time, treasure and talent to be of service to others. For those of us who are retired and healthy, what are we doing to be of service to our parish or wider community?

· We do not fully participate in the Mass. Our body may be present, but our mind and heart are not engaged in the celebration of the Eucharist. We don’t sing. We don’t show hospitality to those around us. We don’t open our hearts to being touched and challenged by the readings or homily. We receive communion in a very routine way. We may even leave early because we don’t want to be delayed in the parking lot. Religious practice is a lot like marriage: if not attended to, it will gradually weaken or die.

How good is our word?

The following reflection is by Fr. Flor McCarthy.

One of the greatest things we can give another person is our word. In fact, there are those who believe that our word is the only thing we have to give. But it’s

easy to give our word. It doesn’t cost anything there and then. The cost comes later, if and when we honour our word.

Some people are very generous with their word. They will promise you the sun, moon and stars. But you can’t rely on them. They don’t really mean it. Their word is worthless. Their promises dissolve like salt in water. How painful it is to deal with such people. There is not one of us who has not experienced the pain of being let down by someone who failed to keep his/her word.

But there are others who are slow to give their word. They don’t make promises easily. But when they do make a promise, you can rely on them to honour it. Their promise is like a chain around their leg. How lovely it is to deal with such people.

When the father in Jesus’ story asked his two sons to go and work in the vineyard, one of the sons said an immediate and definite ‘yes.’ He gave his solemn word that he would go. But he didn’t keep his word. He didn’t go.

The other son also gave his word. He said he wouldn’t go. However, later he changed his mind and went.

Jesus did not hold either son up as an ideal. Yet we can learn from both. The son who said he would go but didn’t is meant to act as a warning to us. We call ourselves Christians but outsiders sometimes accuse us of being hypocrites because our lives do not bear witness to the faith we profess with our lips. Sin does not necessarily imply doing something wrong. The greatest sin is not to do good,” the sin of inactivity, of doing nothing.

And we can learn from the son who said ‘No’ but later changed his mind. To change one’s mind is generally regarded as a fault and a weakness. But this is not always the case. It takes humility to admit one’s mistake, and courage to put it right.

The second son, because he finally obeyed his father, is a lot better than the first. The ideal son, however, would be the son who immediately and willingly carried out his father’s wishes. That is what we should aim at. Jesus is the ideal Son. As St. Paul says, “He emptied himself and became obedient to the point of death, death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him.” (Second Reading)

The parable teaches us that promises can never take the place of performance, and fine words can never be a substitute for fine deeds.

Faithfulness is one of the greatest and most necessary things in life. But faithfulness is costly. It is not an easy road. It demands unselfishness and a spirit of sacrifice. But even here on earth it brings great rewards in terms of growth, serenity, and joy.

There are no such rewards for the unfaithful. There is no happiness at the end of the day for the one who gives his word but fails to honour it. But there is great joy for one who gives his word and honours it.

It is said that a person is as good as his word. If that is so, then the question I must ask myself is: How good is my word?

The person who makes a vow or a promise makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place.

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Catechetical Resources for Families

Helpful Apps

Laudate – helpful with podcasts of the daily readings with reflections so you can pray/listen as you drive

iBreviary – great resource with prayers and readings of the day

The Pope App – can access Pope Francis’ tween and other Vatican information

Lentsanity – great app for Lenten reflections

For Catholic Families

<http://www.catholicicing.com/> - web-site that provides crafts and resources for families, especially helpful for liturgical year links.

Homefaith.com—Practical wisdom for busy parents; you can also subscribe to their weekly reflection piece.

www.catholicmom.com -contains worksheets for each Sunday with blanks to have the kids fill out information about the readings

www.catholicchild.com – great place to buy Catholic gifts for kids

www.loyolapress.com – specifically mentioned for their information about the saints and stories about them for kids but it also has a diversity of resources

www.americancatholic.org - resource articles that are helpful, especially “Youth Update” newsletters

For reflection on the daily readings

www.sacredspace.ie- Daily online prayer offered in 20 different languages by the Irish Province of the Society of Jesus - the Jesuits.

www.prayasyougo.org – podcasts and reflections on the readings of the day provided by British Jesuits

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Sean