

Twenty-sixth Sunday of the Year: September 27th, 2020. THE TWO SONS: GIVING ONE'S WORD: Mt 21:28-32

In this Gospel story today, we cannot help but see two very important words in our lives. What are these words? **They are the words 'Yes' and 'No'**. Of course, it's not the words in themselves but the spirit in which they are said that makes the difference. They can be said glibly and without sincerity, or they can be said thoughtfully and with great sincerity. But that's only the beginning. **At the end of the day what matters is whether or not they are acted on** as mentioned above. Otherwise they remain empty words.

In Jesus' story, when the father asked his sons to go and work in his vineyard, the first son said an immediate and definite 'No. I will not go.' We don't know why he refused to go. Maybe he thought, 'Why does it always have to be me? Let someone else go for a change.' Maybe he had other plans for that day. Or maybe he was just plain lazy.

However, it was early morning when he said that 'No'. A lot can happen between morning and evening. At some point during the course of the day, the word 'Yes' began to sound inside him — at first faintly, then more loudly. A struggle ensued between it and the initial 'No'. Eventually the 'Yes' won the struggle, and he went to work in the vineyard. Of course by this time some of the day was lost. Even so, the father would have been happy to see that he changed his mind.

Now let us consider the second son. He said an immediate and definite 'Yes' to his father: 'Certainly, sir'. But in fact he didn't go. We wonder why not. Maybe he genuinely intended to go but forgot. Maybe he postponed it, and then found it wasn't worth his while. Or maybe he said, 'They'll manage without me.'

At any rate, the day wore on, and the 'Yes' he had said so loudly and clearly in the morning got fainter and fainter. By evening it had turned into a clear and definite 'No'. His case is worse than that of the first son. He had given his word. His father would have been counting on him, and would feel let down when he discovered that he didn't go.

There is part of both of those sons in each of us. Part of the second son because our performance doesn't always match our promises; we sometimes give our word but don't always keep it. And there is part of the first son in us too because we are capable of turning a 'No' into a 'Yes'.

We can learn from both of the sons. All of us have said some important 'Yeses' that we need to see through. (Marriage is an obvious one.) And we have said 'Nos' that should and could be turned into 'Yeses', lest we become known and remembered, not for what we did, but for what we didn't do, for the promises we made but didn't keep.

It's easy to say 'Yes' in the morning of life. In the morning we don't really know what is involved in the task to which we are committing ourselves when we say 'Yes'. But as the day of life goes by this is gradually revealed to us. Then we may have second thoughts. We may begin to entertain doubts. Hence, our 'Yes' can easily turn into a 'No.' If we want to turn our promises into fulfillment we have to go on saying 'Yes'.

The opposite can also happen. We may say 'No' to something or someone in the morning. But during the day we may see things differently, and turn that 'No' into a 'Yes'. A person may make a great mistake,

and then redeem himself, and, by the grace of God, atone for it by making the rest of his life a lovely thing.

Many of the greatest saints in the history of the Church were sinners who initially said 'No' to God, and who later changed their minds and said 'Yes'. St Augustine is perhaps the most obvious example, but there are many others. A person will be judged, not by a single act or stage in his life, but by his whole life. God has given us the freedom to say '**Yes**' or '**No**' — **our 'Yes'** would have no value unless we were free to say 'No'. However, we may say '**Yes to God**' with our words, and 'No' to God with our deeds. We profess to believe, but fail to translate our belief into active obedience. Words are no substitute for deeds. We must, therefore constantly examine ourselves. We must try to turn our promises into fulfilment, and our words into deeds. Every day we can turn one of yesterday's "Nos" into one of today's 'Yeses'. We have several lessons we get from this gospel of Mathew about these two sons.

The primary point of this parable is about having a change in heart, not just about saying or doing the right things. The following stories might illustrate this point. Once there were two couples. **Couple A** were married in a large, beautiful church ceremony. They pledge life-long faithfulness and love to each other in the moving words of their vows. However, their life together has been one of abuse -- both physical and verbal. They both have been unfaithful to each other.

Couple B live together. They had no public ceremony. They signed no marriage license. They spoke no vows in the presence of witnesses. However, their life together is a loving and affirming relationship. They have remained faithful to each other. Which couple would you say is doing the will of God? Both need change of hearts -- couple A in the way they act towards each other and couple B in their attitudes about the importance of the words in a public ceremony.

Another analogy might be with those who attend church and say all the right words, but whose lives fall somewhat short of John's "way of righteousness" and others who live exemplary lives; but who want nothing to do with "organized religion" and the public expression of their faith. Both need "a change of heart".

Another important point, that I feel we can draw from this gospel: **is availability!** To be available. A man applied for a job as a handyman. The prospective employer asked, "Can you do carpentry?" The man answered in the negative. "How about bricklaying?" Again the man answered, "No." The employer asked, "Well, what about electrical work?" The man said "No, I don't know anything about that either." Finally the employer said, "Well, tell me then what is handy about you." The man replied, "I live just around the corner." **Sometimes the greatest ability we can have is availability.** To be where God can call us, to be within whisper range of his summons, that is the beginning of a life of meaningful discipleship. Amen.