

# Scripture Study

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



## Opening prayer

Ezekiel 18:25-28

(Ps 25:4-5,8-9)

Philippians 2:1-11

**Matthew 21:28-32**

## Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel takes place in the Temple area (verse 23) one week before Jesus' Passion. Jesus is speaking directly to the "chief priests and elders of the people" (verses 23-27). Since his arrival in Jerusalem (chapter 21) and for the rest of that week (see chapter 22 and especially the "woes" pronounced in chapter 23), he challenges their authority and that of the Pharisees and Sadducees.
- When they refuse to answer his question about the authority of John the Baptist, Jesus tells them a parable about a vineyard. As we saw last week, the vineyard is a common biblical metaphor for God's people (Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 5:10; Ezekiel 19:10-14).
- This time, the parable concerns the attitude of those sent to work in the vineyard. God desires those who serve him to do so with the "obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5, 16:26; Galatians 5:6, 13-14; James 2:14-26). He also expects our actions to match our words.
- The religious leaders who would not recognize John's authority, also could not accept his message which was to repent of their sins (Matthew 3:2), and that those who did not "bear good fruit" will be "cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10).
- On the other hand, those unencumbered by pride and able to acknowledge their sinfulness were able to receive Jesus' message with joy and simplicity (verses 31-32).

## Questions:

- In the 1<sup>st</sup> Reading, what are Ezekiel's listeners objecting to? (see verses 1-24) Why might they see God's ways as unfair? Why are they not, in fact, unfair?
- In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, what overriding quality or qualities of Christ should be ours when it comes to our dealings with God and neighbor?
- In the Gospel Reading, what links this parable to Matthew 21:23-27?
- In the parable, what is the father's request? What does each son say and do? Why?
- What group of Jesus' listeners (verses 23; verses 31-32) is like what son? How?
- How do you suppose each group of listeners felt about this story?
- Are you more like the first son or like the second one? In what ways?
- Do you look on any group of people as sinners or as "spiritually inferior"? Do you see any danger in that attitude? What is it?
- Have you said "yes" to God? What in your life is a direct living out of that "yes"?
- How can you better respond to God's invitation through John the Baptist to repent, to bear good fruit, and to follow Jesus?

**Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 546, 574—575**

## Closing prayer

*You know well enough that Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them.* –St. Therese of Lisieux

**Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!**

# "The tax collectors and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"

**Scripture:** *Matthew 21:28-32*

*"What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he repented and went. And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.*

**Meditation:** What kind of future are you preparing for? Jesus encourages us to think – to think about the consequences of our choices, especially the choices and decisions that will count not just for now but for eternity as well. The choices we make now will affect and shape our future, both our future on



earth as well as in the life of the age to come.

Jesus tells a simple story of two imperfect sons to illustrate the way of God's kingdom. The father amply provided for his sons food, lodging, and everything they needed. Everything the father had belonged to them as well. The father also rewarded his sons with excellent work in his own vineyard. He expected them to show him gratitude, loyalty, and honor by doing their fair share of the daily work. The "rebellious" son told his father to his face that he would not work for him. But afterwards he changed his mind and did what his father commanded him. The "good" son said he would work for his father, but didn't carry through. He did his own pleasure contrary to his father's will. Now who was really the

good son? Both sons disobeyed their father; but one repented and then did what the father told him.

Jesus makes his point clear: Good intentions are not enough. And promises don't count unless they are performed. God wants to change our hearts so that we will show by our speech and by our actions that we respect his will and we are ready to do what he commands. God offers each of us the greatest treasure possible – unending peace, joy, happiness, and life with him in his kingdom. We can lose that treasure if we refuse the grace God offers us to follow in his way of truth and righteousness. Do you respect the will of your Father in heaven?

*"Lord Jesus, change my heart that I may truly desire that which is pleasing to you. Help me to respect your will and give me the strength, joy and perseverance to carry it out wholeheartedly."*

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