

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 10:27

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord;

I know them, and they follow me.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matt 21:28-32; L136A

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.”



Reflecting on the Gospel

This Sunday begins a series of gospel selections over the next three weeks, each beginning with the introductory phrase, “Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people” (or similar words). In each gospel the phrase introduces a parable that strikes at the hardened and misguided hearts of these religious leaders. They were narrow and exclusive in their belief about who could be saved: only those people chosen from of old by God and who strictly kept the traditions that had been developed. Forgotten by these leaders was the lived law of love of God and neighbor also handed down from of old. Forgotten by them was the message of the prophets calling the people to conversion and renewed covenantal living. Forgotten by them was God’s incomparable mercy and compassion

which does not restrict salvation to a chosen few but instead extends salvation to anyone who is faithful to the divine will. At this point in Matthew’s gospel Jesus has triumphantly entered Jerusalem. These confrontations about who can be saved contribute to the religious leaders’ determined and hateful desire to have Jesus condemned and put to death. Jesus does not shrink from the confrontations, from the truth, from his own choice to be utterly faithful to his Father’s will. Indeed, these gospels suggest a new twist to the saying that we must walk the talk. What Jesus is teaching through these parables is that we must walk the walk. The walk is resoluteness about our relationship with the heavenly Father and doing the divine will.

In this Sunday’s gospel Jesus pointedly indicts the “chief priests and elders of the people” by equating them in this parable with the second son who does not do the “father’s will.” Surprisingly, who does do the “father’s will” are “tax collectors and prostitutes.” Their sinful lives indicated an initial no to God, but then they came to belief, changed their minds, and repented when they heard a call to “the way of righteousness.” Believing is not paying lip service to doing the Father’s will. Believing is changing our way of living, walking “the way of righteousness,” and *doing* the Father’s will. Believing is walking the walk with Jesus, even when that walk includes confrontation, suffering, and death.

Truth be told, all of us are a little like both sons in the parable. Sometimes we hear and respond faithfully to God’s will, but at other times our actions don’t carry through what we hear and believe. The good news in this is that God does not change the divine mind about calling us to salvation. Whether we say yes or no to God’s call, God does keep calling us. We are the ones who need a change of mind. We are the ones who must believe in God’s offer of salvation and faithfully do God’s will.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The longer form of the second reading from the Letter to the Philippians gives us a hint as to how we can hear Jesus’ teaching and respond in faithful obedience: “by being of the same mind, with the same love, / united in heart . . .” This is the kingdom perspective—to change our focus from ourselves to others and, in turn, our concern for others helps us focus on God and the divine will for us. Jesus himself is the model, for “he emptied himself . . . becoming obedient to the point of death, / even death on a cross.” The change of mind described in the gospel entails self-emptying for the sake of others, lived every day in the little things that come our way. This gospel challenges us constantly to turn our hearts toward God, discern the divine will, and walk the walk of Jesus. Faithfully. Obediently. Resolutely.

## Focusing the Gospel

**Key words and phrases:** chief priests and elders of the people; I will not; changed his mind; ‘Yes, sir,’ but did not go; father’s will; tax collectors and prostitutes; the way of righteousness; believe

**To the point:** Jesus pointedly indicts the “chief priests and elders of the people” by equating them with the second son in this parable who does not do the “father’s will.” Surprisingly, who does do the “father’s will” are “tax collectors and prostitutes.” Their sinful lives indicated an initial no to God, but then they came to belief, changed their minds, and repented when they heard a call to “the way of righteousness.” Believing is not paying lip service to doing the Father’s will. Believing is changing our way of living, walking “the way of righteousness,” and *doing* the Father’s will.

## Connecting the Gospel

**to the first reading:** In this selection from Ezekiel the word of the Lord clearly calls the “house of Israel” to conversion of life. The consequences are life or death. In the gospel Jesus clearly calls us to make a choice: to choose life by taking up “the way of righteousness” and doing the Father’s will.

**to experience:** We quickly learn to stop asking something from someone who says yes, but then doesn’t follow through. God, however, no matter how often we fail to follow through on righteous acts, continues to call us back to righteousness, gives us untold chances to change our minds and say yes in deed as well as word.

## Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

**to the readings:** The first reading and gospel this Sunday point out that we have a tenuous hold on righteousness and easily fluctuate between “yes” and “no” to God. But the responsorial psalm indicates that God never wavers in the offer of forgiveness. Psalm 25 invites us to turn our attention from our own behavior to the goodness and mercy of God.

Upheld by such mercy, we can admit our sins of yesterday (psalm) and seek the conversion we need (first reading). We have only to ask and God will teach us what we need to know and to live rightly (psalm). The point is not to worry about being sinners (that is inevitable) but to be humble and honest enough to be teachable. The tax collectors and prostitutes in the gospel have been great learners; the self-righteous chief priest and elders, on the other hand, have learned nothing. God never stops inviting us to a change of heart. It rests upon us to listen, learn, and choose.

**to psalmist preparation:** What does this psalm reveal about God’s manner of relating to human beings? How does it invite you to relate to God in return? What ways do you need to ask God to teach you? What habits or actions from the past (“sins of my youth”) has God helped you change? How when you sing this psalm on Sunday can you be a sign of hope to the assembly?

## ASSEMBLY & FAITH-SHARING GROUPS

- I say yes to God and then don’t follow through when . . . I say no to God when . . . What brings me to change my mind is . . .
- My believing leads to faithful doing when . . .
- For me, “the way of righteousness” calls me to . . .

## PRESIDERS

My preaching challenges the assembly to walk “the way of righteousness” when . . .

## DEACONS

By serving those in need, I inspire others to live in “the way of righteousness” when . . .

## HOSPITALITY MINISTERS

The manner of my warm welcome helps those assembling for liturgy to hear God’s word and say yes to whatever God asks when I . . .

## MUSIC MINISTERS

My participation in music ministry helps me to know better God’s will for me when . . . My music ministry helps me to say yes when . . .

## ALTAR MINISTERS

Serving others well requires me to change my mind about . . .

## LECTORS

The “turn[ing] away” (first reading) I need to choose to do before proclaiming this word with integrity is . . .

## EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

My “Amen” at liturgy becomes a living “yes” to God’s “way of righteousness” when I . . .