

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
October 1, 2023
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

SCRIPTURES:

Ezekiel 18:25-26	Repentance does have an effect on us.
Philippians 2:1-11	Christ humbled himself to become one of us.
Matthew 21:28-32	Jesus promises that repentance makes a difference.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Matthew:

Once more, I find it helpful to take a look of the different audiences to whom this parable was addressed: 1. Those for whom Jesus meant it. 2. Those for whom Matthew meant it. 3. Those in the Church today for whom it is meant.

1. Those addressed by Jesus: (a) The chief priests and elders of the people had not responded to the preaching of John the Baptist. They were paying little attention to the preaching of Jesus. The call to repentance and personal conversion that these two prophets uttered went unheeded by those who should have been taking the lead in the religious community. One would expect that messengers from God would be heard by those who stood in leadership among God’s people. Not so! (b) Tax collectors, prostitutes, public sinners of all kinds were hearing the message and responding in faith and repentance. Those who had said “Yes” to God by their public acceptance of leadership were not responding to Jesus. Those who had previously said “No” to God by the sinfulness of their lives were now coming to faith and repenting.

2. Those addressed by Matthew: Now, 50 years or so after the death and resurrection of Jesus, a new community is being addressed. (a) There is the larger Jewish community out there, not just those who have come to believe in Jesus. For the most part, Judaism has not responded to the message of Jesus. They say they are God’s chosen people, yet they fail to follow the teachings of the One whom God has sent, Jesus the Anointed One, the Messiah. (b) On the other hand, the Gentiles who had not up to now been God’s special people were now coming to God in Jesus Christ. They were hearing the voice of Christ in the preaching of the Church and were coming to fellowship with those in Judaism who had committed themselves to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For Matthew, the yes-sayers were the Jews who said they were already God’s people but failed to listen to Jesus’ teaching. The no-sayers were the Gentiles who had not previously come to God but were doing so now as they accepted the Gospel.

3. Among us today, we know that we have said “Yes” to God in our commitment to Jesus Christ, but at the same time, we often fail to live up to that “Yes.” There are those who have said a firm “Yes” early on in life, but then, they have gradually slipped into an effective “No” as the attraction to sin has entangled them in its webs. Also, there are still those sinners who repent and make a commitment to God and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel:

The prophet Ezekiel lived among a people who were experiencing deep shifts in their spiritual and moral consciousness. Their Temple had been destroyed, along with most of their communal structures and ways of doing things. They were in bondage again, this time in Babylon. Up to the time of the Exile, responsibility and guilt were perceived as primarily communitarian: the nation was responsible as a whole for the sins of the people. Now, they begin to become aware of a new dimension: individuals too are responsible. Persons can repent and be forgiven. It is time for individuals to stop blaming their ancestors and to stop blaming God for their woes. If they change their evil ways, things will go better for them. The fatalism of corporate crime and corporate punishment does not prevent the individual from doing better.

Philippians:

Although we frequently use the terminology of family life when referring to the Church community, most of us do not readily experience Church as family. Even religious orders and congregations of men and women religious are most often so structured and operate with formal procedures that their members do not perceive their lives as familial in nature. The Church at Philippi was different. It met in the home of the wealthy woman, Lydia, a “dealer in purple goods,” who was not from Philippi but had a home there too. Paul exhorts the members of the ‘house-church’ to practice the virtues of Christ himself in their relationships with one another, especially the virtue of humility. Jesus Christ had *emptied* himself of the divine glory that was rightly his in order to live humbly as one of us.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of the two sons do you identify with in this parable: the one who said “Yes” but did not follow through or the one who first said “No” but then regretted it and went to serve? Can you share some event in your life that would illustrate one or the other condition?
2. Why do you think the second son regretted having said “No” to his father? Do you suppose the mutual love he and the father had for one another may have been a factor here? Surely, the first son was loved by his father, too! Why do you suppose he was not motivated by his own love for his father?
3. Look at your parish church community today. Can you see instances when the community has said “Yes” to God, for example at the Easter Vigil, and then said “No,” at least a few times, for all practical purposes, the rest of the year? Do you see any signs of corporate repentance and conversion on the part of the parish as a whole? What would you consider to be signs of community commitment to God and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Consider making a commitment to some project of evangelization at work in your parish community: faith formation programs, social justice activities, etc.

PRAYER

**Father,
you show your almighty power
in your mercy and forgiveness.
Continue to fill us with your gifts of love.
Help us to hurry toward the eternal life you promise
and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.**

Opening Prayer for 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

The average pastoral care worker, the parish priest, or the pastoral counselor will surely have heard this frequent excuse for not going to church: “Look at all the hypocrites who go to church all the time and still exploit their neighbor and abuse the weak and the powerless.” It is said that the same tongue we use on Sunday to praise God is used on Monday to lie and to cheat. Lack of sincerity, or inconsistency in our religious commitments, becomes a scandal to those who observe us.

We often dismiss such remarks with the retort that those who do not go to church are just as inconsistent as churchgoers when it comes to professing values on the one hand and practicing those same values on the other hand. Of course, such *ad hominem* arguments have little impact on anyone. It is far better to acknowledge the truth of the accusations and then try to do better.

In the fellowship of those recovering from addictions, we often hear the slogan: “Walk the walk; don’t just talk the talk!” It is by our deeds that we demonstrate the success of our recovery and not just by our words.

The followers of Jesus Christ are bound by the commitment they have made to model their behavior on him, to follow his example. Truth and sincerity were the hallmarks of his life and his teaching. Jesus said, “Come, follow me.” He did not just say, “Do what I tell you to do.” His faithfulness to the will of the Father led him all the way to Calvary. Paul says that it was because he was obedient to God that God raised him up to new life on Easter Sunday.

There was a time when people might have become Christians because there might have been some worldly gain in being a Christian. The Church community may have been able to grant some privileges or some advantages to those who belonged to the fellowship. Not so today. In business, in politics, in higher education, in entertainment, in the arts, Christians often are not well received. There may be a distinct disadvantage in professing the Christian way of living. To live like a Christian requires courage. One does not say that one is a Christian for any other reason than for the sake of Jesus Christ himself.

We say we belong to Christ; let us live the Gospel.