

Homily of Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2023

Ezekiel 18:25-28; Psalm 25:4-9; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32

In the gospel, the first son who replied to his father, "I will not," afterwards changed his mind and did his father's will. But the second son who said "Yes, sir" to the father did not do his father's will. Jesus used the parable to address the chief priests and the elders who refused to accept him as the savior sent by God, although they were God's Chosen People. The second son represents them. While the first son represents the tax collectors and prostitutes who believed in Jesus and repented. The gospel helps us to understand the first reading. The Jewish leaders were the virtuous persons who turned away from virtue to commit iniquity, and the tax collectors and prostitutes were the wicked who turned away from wickedness.

The readings do not stop at telling us what happened in the Old Testament and during the time of Jesus. The readings are an invitation to us to examine the way and manner we live out our callings and responsibilities. We make all kinds of commitments, promises, oaths, vows, covenants, and agreements when we accept our various callings and responsibilities. Many times, we fall short of them. In this way, we are like the second son.

St. Paul, in the second reading, instructs us that to be true to our callings and responsibilities, we are to have in us the same attitude that is in Jesus Christ who did nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory. Rather, he emptied and humbled himself and was obedient to God to the point of death on a cross.

We can name, from the readings, three vices which make us fall short of our callings and responsibilities and cause us to commit iniquity. The vices are pride, selfishness, and disobedience. These vices have brought the downfall of many people. Therefore, in order to preserve our lives, our callings, and our responsibilities, we are to keep away from those vices. Because of Christ's humility, obedience, and selflessness, "God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name..." Therefore, if we embrace these virtues (humility, obedience, and selflessness), God will also raise us to greater heights.

We read in the first reading, "When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity and dies, it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die." There are many instances of people who started very well, then veered off to bad ways, and ended up badly. There are, also, instances of people who changed from their evil ways and became successful. The conversion of St. Paul (the author of the second reading) is a good example. Again, we are invited to examine ourselves to know whether we have veered off from virtuousness and make a U-turn in time to prevent misfortune.

The first son replied, "I will not," but afterwards, he changed his mind and went." This son teaches us to reflect over our decisions and actions, know when we are in error, accept the necessary corrections, and make the necessary changes. Humility, obedience, and selflessness enable us to take corrections and make changes with less difficulty. But

pride, selfishness, and disobedience keep us unrepentant and blind to truth. According to a research report, it takes 43 muscles to frown and 17 to smile.

The second son replied, "'Yes, Sir,' but did not go." Failed commitments, broken promises, broken oaths, broken vows, broken covenants, and broken agreements have left us with a broken world, broken countries, a wounded Church, broken institutions, broken communities, broken homes, broken marriages, broken relationships, broken friendships, and broken hearts. These cause much pain and distress to many people and the death of many people. We pray for conversion and healing.

Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:37, "Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one." May we be people of integrity who say 'Yes' to truth and say 'No' to evil. As St. Paul invites us in the second reading, may we have in us the same attitude that is in Jesus Christ as we answer our callings and carry out our responsibilities. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP