

Homily 26 Sunday in OT 2023

Last weekend we were reminded about the incredible generosity of God in the parable with the workers who all received the same wage, regardless of the amount of time they worked. Today we are reminded that it is never too late to return home to our Heavenly Father.

It can be hard to motivate children, can't it? We ask them to do something. We remind them, we bribe them, we kid and cajole them. Sometimes we succeed, but sometimes we don't.

In Jesus' *Parable of the Two Sons*, a father asks his two sons to go out and work in his vineyard. The first son says no, but later he has a change of heart and he starts working. The second son says yes, but in fact he does nothing. Does that sound familiar to parents here today? In this story, the father represents God, and the vineyard represents the people of Israel, or our community of faith.

The first son represents sinners, like the tax collectors and prostitutes, who initially reject God but later change their minds and start doing his will. And the second son represents those who at first seem saintly, like the chief priests and the elders. They outwardly say yes to God, but really do nothing at all. They have other priorities.

In this parable, Jesus is warning us. He's saying that those who reject our loving Father, but later repent and obey, will go to heaven. But those who give a meaningless yes to God will miss out, unless they change their ways. Our words mean nothing if our promises aren't followed by action.

Neither of these two sons is given to us as the model to follow, because the ideal person is the one who immediately says yes to the Father *and* carries out his wishes. That's what Jesus did. As Paul says in our second reading, Jesus emptied himself and became obedient, even to the point of death on a Cross. And God was so pleased that he gave him a name above all other names. So, Jesus is the model for us all to follow.

The first son was late in doing his Father's will, but he wasn't too late. Over the years, that's what many sinners have come to learn, and many even became saints. St

Augustine is a good example, but there have been others. St Paul terrorized Christians before meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. St Matthew was a hated tax-collector before becoming a disciple.

Leo Tolstoy wrote a story about three women who went to the well for some water. Nearby, a wise old man watched and listened as the women talked about their sons. 'My son, 'said the first woman, 'is so skillful; he always does things better than the other children.' 'My son, 'said the second woman, 'sings so beautifully, like a nightingale! No-one has such a beautiful voice as him.'

'And you, 'they asked the third woman who was quiet. 'Why don't you say something about your son?'

'Oh, he has nothing which I could praise, or tell about him, 'she replied. 'My son is only a common boy, there's nothing so special about him.'

The women filled their buckets with water and they headed home. The old man followed slowly behind. But the buckets were heavy, so the women stopped for a rest. Suddenly the three boys came towards them.

The first one turned cartwheels, and the women shouted: 'What a skilled boy! Good job! 'The second one sang beautifully, like a nightingale, and the women listened with tears in their eyes.

The third boy went to his mother, took the buckets and went home. Then the women asked the old man: 'What do you think about our sons?'

'Where are your sons? 'asked the surprised old man. 'I can see only one son!'

In this story, the wise old man is God himself. Unlike the others, he's not distracted by the song and dance. The only boy he sees is the third one who carries his mother's buckets. He's the only person who accepts his call to humble service.

Right now, we're all being asked the same question: are we doing the will of the Father? Deep in our hearts we know the answer. Fortunately, it's not too late to change. We need to remember this: For our 'Yes' to be real it must be reflected in the way we live. Amen.