

26th (SJ&QA) Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

After long years of being married the wife complained. *“You told me you’d spend your whole life making me happy.”* The husband replied, *“I didn’t expect to live this long.”* ***Are you a person of your word?*** Ancient Jewish patriarchal society rests on the *core cultural values of honor and shame*. A devoted son is expected to obey everything that his father says or does; his obedience must be grounded in deep love and affection. Jesus presents his parable within this cultural setting.

Strictly speaking, in Jewish culture, a son must never say no to his father, especially in public. Doing so would be grave dishonor to him. But given the two cases of disobedience Jesus points out that it is better to say no but to do the opposite. *“Better late than never,”* is a favorite line of latecomers. For Jesus what matters is not the pleasing outward appearance but a change of heart that results in the final act of obedience despite the initial act of refusal. In our Gospel’s perspective the members of the *yes club* were the Jewish religious community who observed the Mosaic Law to the letter but rejected Jesus. Obedience is necessary, as a good heart is important to fulfill what we say and mean to do. What counts most in God’s eyes is what is in the heart. Our Gospel challenges us, *“Whom am I trying to please?”* When you accomplish something *have you ever asked this question? “Did the Lord like it?”* The Pharisees and the Scribes acted correctly. But what they did was aimed at getting the praise of the people rather than God’s approval. They did right things not because it was good but because it made them look good.

Which of the sons did the father’s will? According to their tradition it is enough to say *yes* outwardly. For Jesus this is not enough. You may have failed to observe the Law but you can have a change of heart and destiny. Be converted

to the Gospel and obey God by believing in Him. Christ's honor and obedience are grounded in deep love and affection. *Is this also true with you?* We are called to work in the Lord's vineyard with great love by following the will of God. If we but see deeper and farther, if we only listen to what is unsaid, we will understand more. When our life has God we can see goodness even in the worst among us.

The choices we made determines the destiny we can make. Some have God but are snaking with the devil. Others claim to be Catholic yet legitimately hold conflicting public and personal beliefs on the sanctity of life. When it comes to obedience to God's Will, *it is better by far to move from bad intentions to positive action than to remain locked into good intentions and no action.* The two sons have the same fault—*what they say is different from what they do.* When you are faced with people you love and they do not act as they say ***how do you deal with that?***

First, things change but there are constants in life, hold on to it. To direct our choices a correct *conscience* is vitally important. *Conscience* literally means “*with knowledge.*” It must be our true guide for decision and action. A wise Buddhist said, “*All that is, is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think, we become.*” Always believe that there is good in every person. Goodness is one constant in life you can hold onto because it is founded in the *truth that God is good.*

Second, do not let chances pass you by. A right relationship with God grows and develops, not merely by what we say or teach or promise. It's what we do that matters most. The two sons are given the same opportunity by the father. One grabs it; the other lets it slip by. We have a choice. No one can force you to share your time, talent and treasure to the church. No one can require you to visit

the sick or comfort the grieving or give food to the hungry or share Jesus with a coworker. What counts most in God's eyes is not only **good behavior but above all a good heart**. Some people may *reject, backbite* or *malign* you. That does not mean you should act like them. It is your decision; don't let emotion or their reaction overcome you. *Have you prayed for grace, courage and perseverance?*

Third, when in doubt or when things and people change, go back to your heart. The heart never lies. What is in there will tell you a lot of true things about God and yourself. It is of vital importance to have a heart that seeks to please the Lord. *Always follow your heart, but also remember to bring your brain along*. Sometimes it's nice to please people, but we should never try to please people at the price of displeasing God. People of integrity are people who do right and whose heart is right. They do the right things out of a desire to please God.

To say yes is a commitment not only of one's words but also of one's thoughts and deeds. In the end we will be judged not on the strength of what we said we would do, but what we actually have done. **Let us pray that we may make wise choices in our lives that will lead to a loving relationship with our brothers & sisters and to a life blessed by the Lord. Amen!**