



SUNDAY GOSPEL

Parable of the two sons

MATTHEW 21:28-32

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, 'What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, "My boy, you go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not go", but afterwards thought better of it and went.

The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, "Certainly, sir", but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?' 'The first' they said. Jesus said to them, 'I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, a pattern of true righteousness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.' ■



GOSPEL REFLECTION

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The setting of today's parable is Jesus speaking to 'the chief priests and the elders of the people'. A great deal has happened in the story since

last Sunday's gospel, but it has not been reported in the Lectionary. Jesus is now in Jerusalem. He has entered the city (Matthew 21:1-11) and taken possession of the Temple, driving out all who would make his House a robber's den (Matthew 21:12-17). The crisis point of Jesus' ministry has

arrived. He will enter into conflict with the established religious authorities, forcing them to exercise judgment upon themselves.

He tells 'the chief priests and the elders of the people' a parable of two sons, one of whom says he will not work in the vineyard, but eventually does and the other who is full of promises, but does not act to make the promises a reality. As always with Jesus' parables, the sting is in the tail of the story, as he asks his critical listeners: 'Which of the two did the father's will', but he had already warned them that this question would be posed. The story opened with Jesus 'earlier question: 'What is your opinion?'

They rightly choose the former son as the one who 'did the will of his Father'.

Jesus has led his audience, so critical of what he has said and done, especially in his driving out of the vendors from the Temple (see vv.12-17), to make their own decision on the way to do the Father's will. It is not a question of mouthing the right words and going through the right rituals; one is called to do what the Father wants.

Jesus continues his discussion with the religious and political leaders of Israel by pointing to those people who had come before him, but whom these established authorities rejected, starting from John the Baptist. He was not believed, even though he came preaching the way of righteousness. Not only did he preach

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righteousness, however; he lived it. Jesus describes him as 'a pattern of true righteousness'. This man who both preached and lived righteousness was killed, but the broken people, the tax collectors and the prostitutes accepted what he had to bring. They believed him, repented, and thus entered the kingdom of heaven. But not even the wholeness given to the broken has touched the hearts of the establishment. They saw it happening, but did not themselves repent.

Jesus is attacking the so-called 'religious people' who go through the motions of being God-directed people, mouthing the right words and performing the right rituals, but not putting their lives where their words are. In the Western world, Christian standards had gradually become the accepted values. In our rapidly changing and increasingly secularised world they no longer play this role in society at large. It is only through lives which speak to a society in danger of losing its soul that Christianity will

give evidence of the kingdom. If we Church-goers, who listen to the gospel, are not doing what we are saying, where can the so-called sinners of our time place their hope and trust? This is a challenge to go to the maverick fringe of society, joining the tax collectors and prostitutes as they make their way into the kingdom. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. 'Refusal' is a strong emotion. What is your opinion about its use and presence in today's gospel?
2. Fr Francis poses 'a challenge to go to the maverick fringe of society'. When was the last time you sat with someone who might be considered in need of God's great love and mercy? Were you able to listen to their story? What did you learn? Maybe being present without judgment offering words of compassion or hope? How might God invite you to model Jesus – to have a strong mind in the Truth yet gentle heart in love?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for Each Other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Response: *Your Kingdom come, your will be done.*

Reflect: There is a strong theme today on 'God's will'. Spend some time asking Jesus to continue to reveal God's will, to refuse God nothing when he invites you to take action and an openness to receive life with all its requests, questions and supposed interruptions.

Closing Prayer: Jesus, help me to listen to the invitations you place on my heart, then to take action, trusting you are there with me.