

## GOSPEL

*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.'

## HOMILY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI (EXCERPT)

*25 September 2011*

In the Gospel, Jesus...recounts the parable of the two sons invited by their father to work in the vineyard. The first son responded: "I will not go, but afterward he repented and went." The other son said to the father: "I go, sir, but did not go." When asked by Jesus which of the two sons did the father's will, those listening rightly respond: "the first" (Mt 21:29-31). The message of the parable is clear: it is not words that matter, but deeds, deeds of conversion and faith. As we heard, Jesus directs this message to the chief priests and elders of the people of Israel, that is, to the religious experts of his people. At first they say "yes" to God's will, but their piety becomes routine and God no longer matters to them. For this reason they find the message of John the Baptist and the message of Jesus disturbing. The Lord concludes his parable with harsh words: "Truly, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him, and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him" (Mt 21:32). Translated into the language of the present day, this

statement might sound something like this: agnostics, who are constantly exercised by the question of God, those who long for a pure heart but suffer on account of their sin, are closer to the Kingdom of God than believers whose life of faith is "routine" and who regard the Church merely as an institution, without letting it touch their hearts, or letting the faith touch their hearts.

These words should make all of us stop and reflect, in fact they should disturb us. However, this is by no means to suggest that everyone who lives in the Church and works for her should be considered far from Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Absolutely not! On the contrary, this is a time to offer a word of profound gratitude to the many co-workers, employees and volunteers, without whom life in the parishes and in the entire Church would be hard to imagine... In the first place, such service requires objective and professional expertise. But in the spirit of Jesus' teaching something more is needed – an open heart that allows itself to be touched by the love of Christ, and thus gives to our neighbour, who needs us, something more than a technical service: it gives love, in which the other person is able to see Christ, the loving God. So let us ask ourselves, in the light of today's Gospel, how is my personal relationship with God: in prayer, in participation at Sunday Mass, in exploring my faith through meditation on sacred Scripture and study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church? Dear friends, in the last analysis, the renewal of the Church will only come about through openness to conversion and through renewed faith.

The Gospel for this Sunday, as we saw, speaks of two sons, but behind them, in a mysterious way, is a third son. The first son says "no," but does the father's will. The second son says "yes," but does not do what he was asked. The third son both says "yes" and does what he was asked. This third son is the Only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, who has gathered us all here. Jesus, on entering the world, said: "Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God" (Heb 10:7). He not only said "yes," he acted on that "yes," and he suffered

*continued over page ►*

it, even to death on the Cross. As the Christological hymn in the second reading says: “Though he was in the form of God, [Jesus] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross” (Phil. 2: 6-8). In humility and obedience, Jesus fulfilled the will of the Father and by dying on the Cross for his brothers and sisters, for us, he saved us from our pride and obstinacy. Let us thank him for his sacrifice, let us bend our knees before his name and proclaim together with the disciples of the first generation: “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11).

The Christian life must continually measure itself by Christ: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5), as Saint Paul says in the introduction to the Christological hymn. And a few verses before, he exhorts us: “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Phil 2:1-2). Just as Christ was totally united to the Father and obedient to him, so too the disciples must obey God and be of one mind among themselves. Dear friends, with Paul I dare to exhort you: complete my joy by being firmly united in Christ.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** Pope Benedict tells us that in humility and obedience, Jesus fulfilled the will of the Father. What do you understand humility and obedience to be?



**Heart:** Jesus took the form of a servant. How do you feel about serving others, just as Jesus did, selflessly and without counting the cost?



**Hands:** What might we do this week to be more “firmly united in Christ”?

## PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’.