

Homily for the 26th Sunday of the Year

A phrase that I remember from childhood days is, 'My word is my bond.' I am not sure that I really understood what my Father meant at the time, but what I do know is that if he said he would do something, he did it, and he expected the same of others. One of the painful lessons we learn in life comes when someone promises to do something but doesn't. We know the consequences of being let down in such a way.

Today's gospel story puts the above in stark relief, but before we look at it, it would be worth saying a word about the context. Last Sunday's gospel was about the workers in the vineyard and the generosity of the landowner to those who came last, much to the displeasure of those who had worked the whole day. We were left with the question, why be envious because I am generous? Today we are back in a vineyard but a lot has happened in Matthew's gospel between last Sunday's passage and today's, notably Jesus' final prediction of his suffering and death, his entry into Jerusalem on the last week of his life, his cleansing of the temple, and immediately before this passage, his being asked by the religious leaders from where he gets his authority for acting the way he does. So things are hotting up and the stakes are getting higher. It is against this simmering background that Jesus asks the opinion of the religious leaders about which of the two sons, the one who bluntly refused the Father's request to work in the vineyard, but then changed his mind, and other who said he would, but didn't go, fulfilled his father's wishes. There is only one answer as we know.

But then comes the bombshell. The son who refused and then changed his mind represents the tax collectors and the sinners who responded to John the Baptist's call to repent and change. The other son stands for the religious leaders who would have nothing to do with John's call to repent because they thought they knew it all. Their lack of acceptance proved that their outward piety was not matched by any real desire to do God's will. They lacked the integrity spoken of by Ezekiel in the first reading and they failed to recognise their own blindness in constantly opposing Jesus and criticising his outreach to those whom they would regard with contempt as 'lost.'

The story challenges us to reflect on our own integrity, doing what we will say we will do. Or being open or not especially if this means leaving our comfort zones. Are our prayers a private conversation with God or do our prayers lead to action? Does our celebration of Mass make real for us the words we will hear in today's Eucharistic prayer opening us to have compassion for children and the poor, for the sick and for sinners? Making us a neighbour to the oppressed and afflicted? Opening our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters? Inspiring in us words and actions to comfort those who labour and are burdened? There was a change in both sons in today's story, but only one of them fulfilled the Father's request, reminding us that it is never too late to change our minds for the better. The words of Rabindranath Tagore put this another way: I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was duty. I worked – and behold, duty was joy.

Bidding prayers for the 26th Sunday of the Year 2020

Celebrant:

God guides the humble in the right path and teaches the poor the right way to live. With these words of the psalmist in our minds and hearts we pray.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will always encourage all its members to live with integrity and walk in the truth.

Lord in your mercy

For leaders and Governments throughout the world especially those coming up to an election – that they will put the needs of the people they are elected to serve before any personal ambition.

Lord in your mercy

For all students beginning a new academic year at University – that they will recognise the signs of the times and behave in such a way as to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Lord in your mercy

For ourselves, especially those of us living under more demanding restrictions – that we will always put the safety of others before our own personal preferences.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the current pandemic and Winifred Ash, James Lewis, Kenneth Balfe, Sheila Hughes, Allan Clark and Eileen Patricia Riley whose anniversaries occur this week, that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Almighty God, you reveal your power most of all by your forgiveness and compassion; fill us constantly with your grace as we walk with integrity through this life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen