

September 29, 2020

Ez 18:25-28; Phil 2:1-11 (or 1-5); Mt 21:28-32

There is this woman that I have known for years. She is a good and religious woman, who tries her best to live her life according to her significant faith in the Lord. We all have these things that can pull us off track - you and I are not different, and neither is she. Despite our deep down goodness and faithfulness, our own history, or pains, or weaknesses can cause us to veer off from doing God's will. The woman tends to try to present herself as better than others - in reality she is down-to-earth and knows she is not - but this attitude (which can pop up in us at any time) can lead us to do things that are not in line with that deep down goodness.

We can begin to look down on others. We can become judgmental, and when we are judgmental we look too much at others issues and not enough in the mirror. It can also lead us to focus on building ourselves up in other's eyes, and not enough at following the Lord and helping our neighbor. Deep down we can be good and caring, but we can make decisions that are self-centered and not in line with God's will. This is something that we can see in the Gospel parable today. The first son refuses to do what his father asks of him. Maybe he was busy with a project of his own, maybe he had other plans for his day, maybe he just thought he was too good to go to work in the vineyard. But as he reflected on his choice, he changed his mind. Similar to my friend I mentioned. When she can see the loftiness of her own view of herself, when she reflects on how this leads her to actions that do not follow the will of God - she will change course and, like to s first son, change her decisions.

The second son gives good lip service, calls him by his formal and respectful title, tells the father what he wants to hear - but he doesn't follow through. Perhaps he just wanted to get in good with the father so he would be in a good mood when he asked for something, perhaps he thought dad would never know he didn't go and he could go on with what he wanted to do for the day, maybe he also just thought the work was beneath him. Both didn't want to do their father's will, both walked off without planning on doing it - one just faked it off better. Jesus clearly holds the first son up to as the model. He DOES actually do the father's will (even if he was resistant to start). Tell you the truth, I have a little respect for him actually telling the father

to his face what he was really intending - at least he's honest. Jesus wants to point out that in the end it is the doing, not the saying that God is looking for.

The first son speaks his mind openly to his father, he doesn't plan on doing as his father asks, he leaves his father feeling bad. But something happens to him after that. He has a conversion, a repentance, and goes and does what is right. Jesus will expand on later in the Gospel about how the humbly doing of the father's will will bring one to the path to Eternal Life - this path is found in the obeying of God (even when it is inconvenient, or we don't see why, or we think we're too good to do it). The change from our current state of selfishness and rebellion is the key. As we heard in the first reading: ... *if [one] turns from the wickedness [they have] committed, [and] does what is right and just, [one] shall preserve [one's] life.* This turning requires a change of attitude - one that stops looking down on others, one that is willing to put aside our own projects and plans to do God's will. Paul tells us how this attitude was modeled in Jesus as he accepted his passion and death (and remember, from the account in the garden, we know he was honest with the Father about his reluctance - but he pushed past this in obedience). Paul says: *Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself.* Jesus could have fallen back on his status as the second person of the Divine Trinity and rightfully claimed that he was too good for this job. He could have said "I'll do your will when you change it to something I like better." He could have just walked off and done his own thing. But he doesn't; in the end Jesus' response was (as our's should be): *Thy will be done.*

It is difficult for us sometimes to let go of our own exalted view of ourselves. But as my friend is discovering more and more, it is in the freely doing the father's will - going to the vineyard - that we open ourselves to the reward Jesus is seeing to give to us. We heard from last week's Gospel it is not a question of how long you are in the vineyard, and we see today it is not about your being totally willing or not. The important thing is to go to the vineyard - to do the will of the Father in this world. For that is the path to a deeper union with God and our fellow travelers, and it is the path to the Kingdom of God.