

Miss Terri asked her Sunday School class to draw pictures of their favourite Bible stories. She was puzzled by Kyle's picture, which showed four people on an airplane, so she asked him which story it was meant to represent.

"The flight into Egypt," said Kyle. "Oh, I see ... And that must be Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus," Miss. Terri said. "But who's the fourth person on the plane?" Well, Kyle smiles proudly and says, "Oh, that's Pontius the Pilot."

This story, aside from being a little inaccurate, has significance because today is the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. It reminds us that the Holy Family were also refugees for a time, living in Egypt to escape king Herod.

Our church has a long history of helping those who have been displaced due to war, famine and other dangerous situations. Our own founding parishes of St William and St Gregory the Great also have a history of sponsoring refugee families and settling them here in this area. Families of different nationalities and different faiths.

The support of migrants also extends to the many migrant workers who are employed in Essex County. Our local churches support and advocate for these workers whose voices are so often ignored.

This is charity and social justice in action. It is not merely words but actions that line up with words of support and words of challenge when people are being used and forgotten. This is putting our mission of love of others into concrete action.

We hear in today's Gospel the mounting tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus has entered Jerusalem in triumph, riding on a donkey, to the cheers of the Jewish people. He has been curing the sick and the suffering in the temple. He has overturned the money tables of the merchants in the Temple who were more interested in making money than worshipping God in his holy place. He says to them,

"It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a den of robbers!"

And so Jesus has caught the attention of the religious authorities because of his actions. And they want to know the source of his authority. They demand an explanation of his actions. He refuses and instead poses a parable.

This is the first of three parables that he shares with the authorities. We will hear the other two in the next couple of weeks. All of them not too subtly depict these particular religious leaders to a tee.

Jesus knows that the actions of the scribes and the pharisees do not line up with what they say. In Matthew 23 Jesus says of them:

“They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.”

Today's parable is very direct. Given the same task by their father, the first son refuses his father in words, but then obeys in his actions. He had a change in heart, and that is called repentance.

The second son obeys with his words, but disobeys in his actions. The question that Jesus poses is pointed: Which son did what the father wanted? I think that we would agree that “actions speak louder than words” and that even if his words were disobedient, the first son who did the work as ordered did the father’s will.

Jesus then tells the religious leaders:

“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.”

The chief priests and elders, the ones who flaunt their piety, did not act according to their impression of themselves. They did not respond to the message of repentance of John the Baptist. Their faulty religious practices in effect became a barrier to God, rather than a bridge.

Instead, John’s message was embraced by those we might not expect; tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners. Because of their repentance, these sinners would enter the Kingdom of God ahead of the religious leaders.

The parable convicts the scribes and pharisees for their hypocrisy and their inaction.

As we have seen, the first son has a change of heart, the second son does not.

How does this parable apply to us today? Do our words show our obedience to God? If not our words, do our actions? God desires a full conversion of heart, that our actions (and our words as well) will give evidence of our love for Him and his beloved people.

We are all called to be obedient to our Heavenly Father, and to seek his will. But how do we do this?

Well let's look at two excerpts from Matthew's gospel:

In Matthew Chapter 22, Jesus explains the greatest commandment:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall

love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

And again, Jesus tells his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”

And so I would sum up our mission in this way: Our mission is to love God, love others and bring people to Christ.

By virtue of our baptism, we are entrusted with this responsibility. And we do this by imitating the first son.

I can't speak for you but I know that if I had a penny for every time I behaved like the second son, I'd be a rich man, at least materially. I think it is safe to say that we all have at one time or another, said one thing and done another; we have all professed moral righteousness but have fallen short in our actions.

- Do we spend more time working on our favourite hobbies than on our prayer life,
- Do we spend more time becoming an expert in our profession than in our faith,
- Do we tolerate in our own lives hidden habits of selfishness and sin.
- Are we silent on moral issues like abortion because we are afraid to offend someone.

When we take the time to examine our priorities and our choices, we may find that there is a contradiction between what we profess to believe and how we live our everyday lives. And that is not a good thing.

When we fall into that contradiction, we don't grow in our experience of God's love, his grace and his mercy. We don't grow in wisdom and peace. We don't grow in deep Christian joy that is the earmark of a true Christian. We end up risking our very souls.

A faith that is lived each day is a faith that makes an impact on our own lives and the lives of so many others who need to hear and see our witness.

St James expressed this well:

*"For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead" (James 2:26).*

I encourage you to continue to heed God's call in each of your lives, each and every day. We have

done so much as a parish and as individuals to support the vulnerable around us. There is still so much to be done.

May we continue to love God by loving others and showing them by our words and actions that God's mercy and love is available to all people, regardless of what their lives look like now; regardless of the choices they have made in the past. Our God is ready to comfort and heal those who turn back to him in their need.

I recommend you take the time to watch the reflections of Pope Francis on The World Day of Migrants and Refugees. You can go to YouTube, and search for the videos called "youtube world day of migrants." These are videos that show the struggles of different refugees and displaced people, together with a reflection by our Holy Father.

Our area 40 Days for Life Prayer Vigil in front of Met Hospital has once again begun this week, complete with all safety protocols. This is a way for all of us to make a profound difference in this culture of death by changing minds, changing hearts and saving the lives of unborn children. Just google 40 Days for Life Windsor and give Laurie Eberhardt a call for more information.

Remember the old saying? *"The road to hell is paved with good intentions?"*

Let us instead, pave the road to Heaven by backing up our good intentions with Christian action.