

## **A Change of Mind**

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

September 27, 2020

Fr. Tony Davis

The word ‘repent’ has often been presented as a threat. Perhaps this is most evident in the signs held by people standing on street corners warning the general public of the end of the world. Most of the time, the word REPENT is in big upper-case letters, maybe even with fire under it. This is unfortunate. Repentance is not necessarily a threat; it is an invitation. Repentance quite simply means ‘to have a change of mind.’

Whenever we are overly moralistic and self-righteous about repentance, we may have missed the point. In fact, Jesus said that the so-called immoral ones – the tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners – are entering the kingdom of God before the ones who are so-called moral. Repentance isn’t about moral perfection or following all the commandments. It is not about being righteous or an upstanding citizen. It is fundamentally the ability to change your mind. That is the most difficult thing to do!

In the Gospel passage, it was the first son who is credited with doing the will of the father precisely because he was able to change his mind. In contrast, Jesus criticized the chief priests and the elders because they did the opposite. Not only did they not change their minds, but they became even more stuck in their ways. Nothing within them called them to be more loving and understanding of other people. Nothing that John the Baptist said was appealing. Again, it was the immoral ones who came to believe through the preaching of John the Baptist. Jesus concludes, “yet even when you saw that, you did not later

change your minds and believe him.” These religious leaders missed their first and second invitations to have a change of mind. They didn’t seem like very happy people.

To not have a change of mind is the path towards much unhappiness. Eventually we will realize that thinking we are always right is making us sick. The spiritual author Fr. Thomas Keating said, “Repent- that fundamental call in the gospel to begin the healing process- means ‘change’ the direction in which you are looking for ‘happiness.’ The various orientations for happiness that we brought with us from early childhood are not working. They are slowly killing us.” (*Intimacy with God*, 40)

Christ gives us the greatest example of having a change of mind. He went from a divine mind to a human mind. As we heard in the second reading from *Philippians*, “though he was in the form of God, [Christ Jesus] did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness.” If our savior can literally make the change from a divine mind to a human mind, surely we can have a change of mind. If we don’t, we will slowly die.

*Being able to repent, to have a change of mind, is our path to happiness.* What life experiences have I had that allowed me to have a change of mind?

Perhaps the word ‘repent’ is a threat after all. Of course it starts as an invitation. God is so patient with us. Sooner or later, however, we reach the point where we must decide if we want to live with our mind or with the mind of Christ.