

26th Sunday- A
Deacon Pat Hall

Ezekiel 18:25-28; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/092511.cfm>

Are these the only choices we're stuck with? A kid who says he won't and does...and a kid who says he will and doesn't? Can't I have a kid who says they will... and does? Oh, that's right...that's my daughter.

So which one of these sons did his father's will? Given we have only two choices, even the chief priests and elders got the right answer. Because the second one didn't go to the vineyard, a crop might have been lost.

But how is the first son such a great role model?

Have you ever been in public and had one of your children disobey you? Have you ever had a subordinate at work disrespect you in front of colleagues? Have you ever had a peer front you off in the company of friends?

As much as you can imagine your personal embarrassment, multiply that by the profound shame experienced by our first century, Middle-eastern father. In this honor-based society, this kind of shame could justify disownment of the son. This idea of disownment can be traced through the Hebrew people's history.

The Old Testament chronicles the covenant between God and his people. They would be his people and He would be their God. They needed to follow his commandments. As long as the Hebrew people honored God, He would preserve and protect them. If they dishonored him by ignoring the widows, orphans and strangers...if they worshipped alien gods, then the deal was off and the people were subject to being abandoned. And while justice dictated that God should find another people who were not so stiff-necked, God kept giving his chosen people other chances.

In fact God's abandonment was more like a series of time outs...40 years here, hundred years there, an exile there, a foreign occupation here. In the end though, Scripture is a record of what Father Ken says is God's relentless love pursuit of his people.

All of this is summed up in that first son's actions when he said, "I will not."

So how come we are honoring the first son who publically shamed his father? It is because... "afterwards he changed his mind and went." He changed his mind. He

changed. Maybe he felt guilty about how he hurt his dad. Maybe he repented. One of the definitions of repent is "to rethink." Our Church uses a theological term to describe this change of mind, change of heart, this conversion of self. It is a Greek word: metanoia.

So when Jesus challenges the chief priest and elders that tax collectors and prostitutes would enter the kingdom of God before them it wasn't because Jesus held tax collectors' and prostitutes' behaviors in high esteem. In fact the chief priests, elders, tax collectors and prostitutes all had one thing in common. They were all collaborators with the Roman occupiers--not a good thing. The difference is that the tax collectors and prostitutes believed in John's way of righteousness, the chief priests and elders did not. Some changed and entered the Kingdom of God. Others did not change.

Most of you have a clue about what needs to change in you before going out into the vineyard. In fact I wonder if I weary God with the repetitiveness of my New Years resolution. So how do we change for God?

We can't just do it. It takes practice and time. But our deciding time is pretty finite. I'm closer to my exit date than my birth date, so it would be good if I got started sooner before later.

In the end though, the change I am asked to undergo is more than my personal will and conscientious can supply. No worry. That's where God's grace comes in. That's why we come together to this table, to receive his strength, to share together in his very divine being.

Despite all my past failures, I have reason to hope that God can bring to fulfillment what he started in my parents' love.

Remember that Greek word I mentioned earlier: metanoia? What's good sometimes about foreign words is that we aren't able to define them too precisely. They leave some vague space for interpretation. That vague space is where mystery can sometimes come alive.

I'd like to give you a minute of quiet time with the word, metanoia. You might pray in commitment to change. You might pray to ask for change. You might pray that God will bring to fulfillment all you were made to be. Open a space in your heart for God to enter.

(minute of silence)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen