

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time A

Texts: *Ezekiel 18:25-28; Phil 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32*

By

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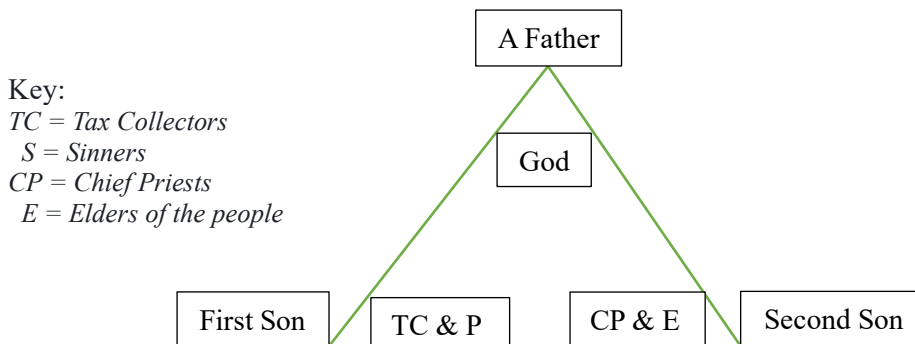
Themes from the three readings

1. Righteousness preserves and sustains life. It guarantees the eternal life.
2. Christian believers should preserve oneness and unity with one another through love, humility, and mutual care in the imitation of Christ.
3. It is always wise and an act of righteousness to turn from obstinacy to obedience of faith.

Structure and Commentary on the Gospel

Today's Gospel reading begins with Jesus's question to his listeners. The Lord invites the chief priests and elders of the people to deliberate with him. Jesus often draws his interlocutors to take counsel with him. The good Lord is our leader on the path of discovery of the truth.

Now, the Lord tells a parable about a father and his two sons. It follows the typical triangular pattern of relationship and interaction among parabolic characters: the father, his first son, and his second son. This pattern can also be observed reflected in the application of the parable by the Lord. Thus, there are three figures: God, the chief priests and elders of the people, and tax collectors as well as prostitutes. See chart below!



Consequently, the religious leaders who neither believed John the Baptist nor consider faith in Jesus lose their moral and spiritual authority both in the past and in the present. Therefore, they need conversion. This is the sense and purpose of today's parable by our Lord. The moral outcasts: sinners and tax collectors of the society have become the models in religion, spirituality, and morality. The reason is that they are docile to John's way of righteousness. And they also believe in Jesus. These negatively categorised people in the society are able to rise unto righteousness through their faith. In other words, they repent and they are converted. It is often not our past that holds us down, but our continued obstinacy in the refusal to do what we have promised to do. It means knowing the good but remaining complacent and lacking the will to act. Now, we must be awakened to to embrace the call to obedience of faith.

It is noteworthy that the Lord's interlocutors judge accurately. When the Lord seeks their opinion, they give the appropriate response. Yes, God has blessed us with knowledge and insight about good and evil. We must have the courage that comes from faith and the Holy Spirit to choose to do good and to avoid evil. Our verbal yes to God, our heavenly Father, must be translated into good works. This will be the proof of the faith, which moves us and leads us to obedience. Why is it that reasoning and talking well do not easily translated to practically

acting well and doing the good that we know and proclaim? The Lord Jesus calls us to act on our knowledge of the good. There is no more time left for personal presumptions upon our religious and social status. We are as good and noble as we are ready to put our faith in action through obedience, in humility, by showing love in action, and by caring for God's children.

Today's parable goes beyond the intellectual and theoretical debates about salvation through faith alone or by faith and works. If one believes, then one must engage in good works. And if one engages in good works, then one must believe. No good father and mother would declare love for their children without giving them the food and drink stored in their house. The parents demonstrate their faith in the growth of their children by feeding them well, instructing them accurately, and being present to them. We must nurture ourselves by matching our faith with obedience to God's commandments. Faith is beyond categorizing of people as good and bad in the society. But rather, faith implies doing the right thing at all times. It means reversing our obstinate no to God and going forth to work in our heavenly Father's vineyard. Faith recognizes that every moment is a God-given opportunity to accomplish the demand of our "yes" to God, or to make a U-turn and go to work in obedience to the demands of our heavenly father.

There will be reversals in favour of sinners who embrace conversion and choose the life of obedience in faith. These are the models of God's kingdom.

Should we not reverse our obstinacy and embrace the obedience of faith, which flows from conversion and repentance? Yes, we should do so! That would enable us to live a life of righteousness and thereby preserve our lives from destruction and eternal death. Better expressed, we would be walking confidently on the path of eternal life!