**17th SUNDAY after PENTECOST SERMON: Matthew 21:28-32**

**September 27, 2020**

The Parable of the Two Sons that we just heard is to be read in the context of last Sunday’s Gospel of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. These two parables are both calls to discipleship: last Sunday: the call to work in the vine at different times in the day and the rewards of discipleship – the payment at the end of the day; this Sunday: the call of two sons to work in the vineyard and the two different responses, among many, to that call.

Let us review this Sunday’s parable: It starts with the question: ***What do you think?*** A certain man had two sons, and he asked each of them to go to work in the vineyard. The first says no, but then he has a change of heart and goes. The second says yes, but he never shows up for work in the vineyard. Then Jesus ends the parable with another question: ***“Which of these two sons did the will of his father?”***

The answer of the Pharisees to this question was: the first son. Then, Jesus pointed out that the first son stood for the tax collectors and the prostitutes. They were people who lived notoriously sinful lives. But we see in other parts of the gospel that when Jesus called them away from their sinful ways, they “changed their minds”, that is to say, they left those sinful lives behind and followed him.

How about the second son? In the succeeding verses, particularly Verse 45, it says, *"When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard this parable, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him****…"*** For it was the second son that the chief priests and the Pharisees saw themselves.

So what does this parable have to do with us? Now remember that Jesus’ parables are stories that serve as a mirror for us to look at. They only have relevance and significance if we can see ourselves reflected in them. Thus this brings us to this crucial question: ***Where do we see ourselves in the story?*** Here, I believe, lies the beauty of the parable of Jesus: We can see ourselves on either the first or the second son.

Let us start by looking at ourselves in the **second son:** the son who so graciously promises to work in the vineyard but then fails to fulfill his promise. The second son reminds us of ourselves, who have made a lot of promises in our life: promises to God, to country, to Church, to family and to one another. I am sure that we have made honest attempts to be true to our promises; but I am equally sure that we often find ourselves falling short. We all know what it is like to say one thing and then find ourselves doing another. We are a bundle of inconsistencies. We are all guilty. Jesus' parable hits us right between the eyes.

However, let's not forget, that in more ways than one, we can also identify ourselves with **the first son**: "the tax collectors and prostitutes (code word for sinners). After all, we are all sinners. And what was it about those sinners that got them included in the kingdom? The parable says: ***For John came and the tax collectors and the prostitutes changed their minds and believed him.***

The key word is REPENTANCE: means “changing our mind which leads to a change of HEART.” This should be a constant feature in the life of the disciples. Jesus stated the need of repentance right from the very beginning of his ministry: “*Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand”*……. And in another part of the gospel: *I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.*

And so in this parable for today, Jesus is inviting us who are both first son and second son – depending on where we are in our lives today: To remember our YES – our many promises and to fulfill them. To remember our NO – the many times we failed and our need of repentance,

Remember, that it is never too late. Even after a first, or a second, or a third “no”— like the son in the Gospel,—it is never too late to say “yes” to the Lord, to turn back to him. Not only is it never too late to begin to follow him, there is nothing in our past that renders us unfit to turn to him. “Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God.” If they can turn away from their former way of life—no matter how long they have been entrenched in that life—then, we can turn to the Lord as well, and he will receive us with joy.

Lastly, let us look at this call to change our mind leading to a change of heart in the context of our present situation that faces the corona virus pandemic. Yes, the pandemic is making us seriously consider the so many CHANGES: FROM HAND WASH TO WEARING A MASK TO SOCIAL DISTANCING, from working at home and our children in distant learning, from take outs to eating on sidewalks and makeshift shades, to even worshipping under the tent. We see changes in shopping patterns, the closing of department stores and the dominance of delivery trucks and vans. We even have doctors visit on line. Our world is changing and we are changing with it. WE can respond to these CHANGES like the first son or the second son. Let us pray that we will respond as the FIRST SON, Amen.

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