

**26<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle - A; Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> 2023**  
**Ezekiel 18: 25-28; Philippians 2: 1-11; Matthew. 21: 28-32**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Today's first reading and the gospel passage aim at the unfaithfulness of the Jewish people. God chose the people of Israel to be His special people and He drove out the gentile occupants from their lands and gave them to Israel, on condition that they would remain faithful to God and observe His commandments and directives. The people promised their fidelity to God and remained faithful to Him for some time. But soon their **'yes' to God became 'no'** and they went after foreign gods and worships. So they have been punished for their iniquities.

Coming to the gospel passage, through the parable of the two sons, we see Jesus pointing his finger at the Jews. Through the parable of the man and his two sons Jesus shows the attitude of the Jews towards his teachings and on the other hand the receptive minds of the non-Jews who never cared about the true God of Israel. The Jewish people waited for the coming of the Messiah for centuries. They considered him to be the savior and their hearts yearned for him. Finally, John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of the Messiah and tried to prepare the hearts of Israel to accept the Messiah. Unfortunately, they never listened to him whereas the gentiles and sinners who always turned their back against the Messiah, accepted him. At last when the Messiah appeared in the person of Jesus in a simple way, the Jews turned their back to him. For, Jesus didn't appear the way the leaders of the Jews expected. Thus, though originally they said 'yes' to the Messiah, they turned against his preaching. On the other hand, the tax collectors, prostitutes and public sinners repented for their attitudes and turned to Jesus with interest. History is witness to that.

Initially the Jewish people pleased God by their 'yes,' but later offended God. In fact, both sons were not the perfect examples of obedience. At least Jesus gave credit to the first son who repented for his 'no' and did his father's will. This parable praises neither of the sons, though the first son's action is preferred to the second one. To be justified and perfect before the father, the sons should have been totally obedient. Their attitude was supposed to a total **'yes'** to their father. But both displeased the father.

In the modern world it has got wider application, it is setting before us a picture of two very imperfect sets of people in the Church. We meet these two types of people in every community. And also we belong to one of these groups. The first type of people, who stand in the place of the first son, may not be very appealing in their promises or practice of faith. They may not be seen very often in the church or in any ministries. But

when a genuine need arises in the church or community, to the surprise of everybody, they will be there with a helping hand. In the eyes of the parishioners they are the fallen away Catholics. In my pastoral life in the diocese I have seen many such people. These people apparently said 'no' to the established laws and precepts of the Church. But when the need arose, they were there. Whereas the second group of people seem to be very agreeable and positive. But they only remain in their promises. In other words, their promises are not converted into actions. What Jesus expects from us is not mere sweet words of promise, rather the actions. **This parable teaches us that promises can never take the place of our performance, and fine words are never a substitute for fine actions.** God does not want polite and hypocritical promise. He wants us to walk the walk not just talk the talk. Jesus makes it very clear in *Matthew's gospel 7: 21*, "*Not all those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven.'*" Jesus at least gave credit to the first son, due to his repentance and action.

This parable also teaches us a comforting lesson. We are human beings and we may fail to make promise to God and do things the way He demands. Sometimes you and I say 'no' to God for our personal gain and interest. But if we repent and do our best, we are justified before the Lord. God always welcomes a repentant sinner. It is not the desire of God that a sinner should die in his sins, rather He rejoices over the conversion of a sinner. That is what the parable of the prodigal son shows. Jesus will prefer a doer who may not have succeeded in his doing to a non-doer. Jesus' point in this parable is that it is never too late to change our mind if we have not been living the way God wants us to do. This parable gives us the lesson that no matter what we've done in the past; but what matters is what we are today with God. Of course, like the Blessed Mother, it is praise worthy that we always say 'yes' to God. But as weak human beings it may not be possible for us. So we fall and rise and seeing our efforts to rise, Jesus forgets our falls and appreciates our effort to rise and also then he will give us a hand. Let us remain to be, at least the first son whose 'no' didn't last long before it became 'yes.'