

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - A

What a rich selection of readings we have this week, each of them speaking in their own way to what lies at the heart of our salvation: right relationship with God. Our Gospel this week picks up right where we left off last week, in how it again makes use of the language of a vineyard to describe what the kingdom of Heaven is like.

If you recall, in last week's Gospel, Jesus told a parable about the kingdom of heaven: a landowner who went out at multiple times of the day to hire laborers to work in His vineyard. When it came time at the end of the day to pay the laborers, he gave each of them the same wage. Although this can sound unfair to us, as we learned last week, this parable teaches us something important about God: that God is Love itself and as such he only knows how

to pay one wage: His love which is perfect and complete. But then how do we respond to His love?

In today's Gospel we have the story of two sons who respond differently to their Father's request to go work in His vineyard. The first son initially says "no", only to later change his mind and go to work in the vineyard, doing what his Father had asked.

Meanwhile, the second son, although having said "yes" at first, in the end never actually follows through on his word. I think it is fair to say that at different times and depending on the circumstances in our lives, each of us can identify with both sons. Sometimes we say we're going to do what God wants of us, only to get distracted along the way by our worldly concerns or pleasures, by sinful habits or tendencies, or even by the strong pull of inertia or indifference. Perhaps at other times we ignore the Lord, only to later have a change of heart.

It's of course the first son, the one originally says no to his father, who ultimately ends up doing what his father had asked of him. Building upon this, I want to focus on what I see as the two most important lessons that we can learn from his response to God's gift. First, it is never too late to say "yes" to God's invitation. Until the day that we draw our last breath, God never withdraws the invitation to follow Him. Whatever the first son's reason for initially saying "no", eventually he changes his mind. The Greek word used to describe the son's "change of mind" is *metanoia*, which also can mean *repentance* or *conversion* in the spiritual life. It is a turning around or a reorientation of one's own thoughts and way of living to align them with God's. Practically speaking, this means that there is never anything we can do, any sin we can commit, or any distance that we can stray from God that takes us outside the reach of His love and forgiveness. God is always waiting to welcome us at the very moment we turn back toward Him.

This brings us to the second lesson, which is just as important as the first. Our journey back home to God the Father is a lifelong journey that begins at baptism and doesn't reach its completion until the day we come to see God face to face. It is a journey from slavery to freedom; it is a journey from death to the fullness of life, which is why we must learn to be patient with both ourselves as well as with others. And what is the pattern of this journey? It is the pattern we heard proclaimed today in our second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, in which he encourages them to have the same attitude as Christ, which is an attitude of humility. We can begin to practice this humility by honestly asking ourselves: Is my way working out? And if not, why not? Humility is also expressed in living a life in service to others, putting the needs of others ahead of our own.

And what about the second son, the one who said "yes" at first but never actually went to the vineyard to do what his father had

asked? What can we learn from him? First, it reminds us that the Christian faith is not primarily about a set of moral teachings or doctrines. Yes it is that, but even before that, the Christian faith is about a belief in Someone: Jesus Christ. That is to say it is about entering into a living relationship with Jesus Christ in such a way that we allow Him to inform and transform every aspect of our lives. To say “yes” to Him and then to not follow through is to fail to enter into this living and life-giving relationship. It is to not enter into the gift of love that God so desires to share with us.

And this brings us to the central question found at the heart of all three of our readings today. It is a question that God poses to each of us individually, as well as to us as a community of believers: Is there anything in your life right now that is preventing you from doing what God is asking of you? And furthermore, is there anything that is preventing you from receiving the fullness of the gift of love that God wants to share with you? What prevents you

from responding to God and entering into the vineyard to do His work? Is it doubt in God's love and mercy for you personally, because of some past sin or mistake? Is it a doubt or fear that God's plans for your life (God's will) will not bring you true happiness and peace? Whatever it is, I encourage all of us to take this question to prayer this week, either whether here in church, or perhaps before a Crucifix or an image of Christ in your own home. It is only in prayer, in the silence and mystery of God's loving presence that our hearts and minds can be changed; that our doubts and fears can be overcome, and that we will receive the grace and the strength to say yes to the Lord, to begin to carry out our part in God's ongoing work of salvation, and to receive His love for us.

- **September 27, 2026 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**