

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday – A – 2017  
October 1, 2017  
Holy Spirit (HG)

Ez. 18:25-28  
Phil 2:1-11  
Matt 21:28-32

*“Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus.”*

I. Pope Paul eloquently said in his encyclical, “On the Evangelization of Peoples,”

“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. ...It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus – the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.”

- we say the same thing more colloquially when we say, “Your actions speak so loudly, I can’t hear what you are saying.”
- I recall as a teenager, my generation would become so vexed with adults who told us what to do, but by their actions they did something else. I recall we had no time for hypocrites.
- and Pope Francis has said – the world stands not so much in need of teachers as it does of witnesses.
- while we know it is important to teach the truth, what really gains credibility are those people who live the truth in their daily lives.

II. So who are you in the gospel parable?

A. Are you the son who said “no” and then had a change of heart and later on does what is the right and good thing to do?

- or are you the son who says “yes” to God’s will but then never really follows through?
- chances are, each of us is each son, depending upon our stage in life or the circumstances of the situation
- the second son, of course, is the hypocrite: the person who has all kinds of goals and dreams and ideals but never really gets around to doing it
- think, for example, of those unfulfilled New Year’s resolutions, promises to connect with someone, promises we make to ourselves – or those secret promises we make to Jesus to overcome a sin, to be more virtuous, to work on our spirituality.

- we are that person who wants to look good in front of others – and to ourselves – but inside we really aren't that person.
- the road to hell, they say, is paved with good intentions.

B. And then there is the son who was rebellious and stubborn – who said “no,” – I'm not going to do that – and then later changes his mind and goes and does what is right.

- in a certain sense, it seems our whole lives are spent in moving from no to yes
- in the Christian life we are constantly called to transform our “no” into yes.
- there are many examples of people who moved towards “yes”
- consider the prophet Jonah who refused to go to Nineveh to preach a message of repentance. After some strong divine persuasion, he reluctantly went to Nineveh to do God's will
- or Mary of Magdala or the Prodigal Son: each of whom had a conversion to doing God's will
- or Peter who denied his best friend and then repented...Thomas who moved from the no of doubt to the yes of belief...or Paul who persecuted Christians and then became the Apostle to the Gentiles
- John Newton who was a slave trader and then had a dramatic conversion in a storm at sea and eventually ended up giving us the famous hymn, “Amazing Grace.”
- or a young man orphaned at age 16...a bum traveling through Europe at age 18...a communist at age 20...a Catholic at age 23...a Trappist monk at age 26 and then a writer and spiritual leader: Thomas Merton
- Dorothy Day who dabbled in socialism, had an abortion...then became a very devout Catholic and founder of The Catholic Worker movement. Her life witnessed to her faith.
- perhaps you know of personal examples of people who turned away from Christ...who said “no!” ...and then found a path to Christ and deep faith.

III. What is the resolution for either son: the one who said yes and then didn't follow through – or the son who said no and then had a change of heart?

- it is, I believe, what Paul is teaching us in the second reading, “Your attitude must be that of Christ.”
- and what is that attitude? It is an attitude of self-emptying. It is an attitude of giving ourselves over to doing God's will – in living in openness to God's grace.

How many times do we make self-fulfilling choices? And when do we make self-emptying choices?

- class of '67: how many times in the last 50 years have you made choices which were all about you – your own selfish goals and desires? And what is the end result of such choices? Do they lead to genuine happiness and fulfillment?
  - and when you made self-emptying choices – choices in which you had the best interest of others in mind first, times when you chose to live in service to others and set aside your own selfish desires: what was the end result? Do such choices lead to peace and contentment of heart?
  - marriages, too, can start off with conflict, misunderstanding, immature struggles for power and control – but if the partners learn to move beyond their mistakes, to make self-emptying choices...they will find the blessings and grace of the married vocation.
- IV. Disciples of Jesus are always called to say “yes.” To make it a genuine and honest “yes” to God’s will. This can happen when we surrender to the gift of grace and the power of that grace to work in our heart. In this way, we become those credible witnesses people will really want to listen to.

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