

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 1, 2017 A

Opening prayer: *God of mercy, lead us on your path of goodness. Enlighten our minds so that we may come to know your truth and guide our footsteps in the way of righteousness. Be with us as we gather to break open your holy Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: Life has many seasons. How would you describe this season in your life? What do you like most and least about it?

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the first reading, Ezekiel tells us that each of us is responsible for our own conduct, and will be judged accordingly. In the second reading, Paul reminds the Philippians that self-seeking and rivalry have no place in the Christian community. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that “actions speak louder than words.”

If you had not read the commentary prior to your meeting, consider doing so before or after each Scripture reading.

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 18:25-28

Ezekiel tells his fellow exiles in Babylon that each individual will be held responsible for his/her individual sin. For the Israelites, this is a radical, new teaching. Until now, they believe in what is called “corporate responsibility.” In Ezekiel, we read the ancient proverb: “*The fathers have eaten sour grapes and their children’s teeth are set on edge* (18:2). The idea of *corporate responsibility* means that they are now paying for the sins of their ancestors; hence, the words: “*The Lord’s ways are not fair,*” found at the beginning of today’s reading. Ezekiel states clearly that we are responsible only for our own sins. If the sinner repents, he/she will experience a whole new beginning with God. Conversely, if the virtuous person sins, he/she will pay for his/her sins.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 25

This psalm speaks beautifully of God’s compassion for the sinner that turns to him. The note of conversion, as the Psalmist sees his own sins in the light of God’s goodness, makes this psalm a suitable accompaniment for the change of heart mentioned in the first and third readings.

SECOND READING: Philippians 2:1-11

While in prison, Paul hears from his visitors about the bickering and division amongst his beloved Philippians. From the deepest recesses of his heart, he appeals to them to change their destructive ways. Because they have been baptized into Christ, they

are called to live in a fellowship that should be characterized by love, humility, mutual respect, altruism and unity. Paul holds Jesus up for his readers as their model for this transformation process. Look at Jesus, even though he is God, he is willing to surrender his equality with God in order to become fully human. He is willing to forgo his innocence to take on the sins of humanity. Because of his willingness to change, God fills him with his glory. In placing before them the self-emptying of Christ, Paul is suggesting to the Philippians a radical de-centering of their lives—from self-absorption to self-giving.

GOSPEL: Matthew 21:28-32

This is the first of three consecutive parables in Matthew on the theme of Judgment Day and how we will be responsible for our poor choices. In each of the three stories, the result is predictable. The one who is faithful to the call will be rewarded, and the one who does not respond will be condemned.

Before we get to the choices in today’s parable, we should note that this story does name some key themes found in Matthew’s Gospel:

- The importance of doing and not saying. “*Not all who say to me: ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the one who does the will of my Father*” (7:21).
- Repentance. Neither son acts as he should, but the first son repents, changes his mind and

fulfills his father's order. In today's first reading, we see that God rewards repentance: "*If someone turns from the wickedness he has committed, and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life*" (Ez. 18:27).

In today's Gospel, when Jesus asks the chief priests and elders which of the two sons did the father's will, he is inviting them to pass judgment on themselves. The *first son* stands for sinners (tax collectors, prostitutes, etc.) who initially said 'no' to God, but is now saying 'yes' to Jesus. The *second son* represents Jesus' audience, the religious leaders of the Jewish people and recipients of God's revelation. They, or their ancestors at one time, said 'yes' to God, but are now saying 'no' to him by their rejection of Jesus. The first group, in cooperation with the grace of God, is able to have a change of mind and thereby opens their hearts to Jesus. The latter group refuses to have a change of mind and heart and is therefore shut out of the Kingdom.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most? Why?
2. In the first reading, the people say: "*The Lord's way is not fair.*" Have you ever felt that, or at least wondered about God's sense of fairness? How does his sense of justice differ from ours?
3. In the second reading, Paul encourages us to "humbly look on others as more important than ourselves." How hard is this? How would such an attitude play out in the marketplace?
4. It seems that the Pharisees are giving a superficial 'yes' to God. They say their prayers, go to the temple, keep the law, but at a deeper level, are saying 'no' to God. They are rejecting his revelation in Jesus. Can this happen to us? It's a scary thought: a superficial 'yes' covering a deeper 'no.'

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestion: This week, spend some time reflecting on the depth of your 'yes' to Christ. Also, check to see how ready you are to accept responsibility for your mistakes and wrongdoings.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray that all of us will grow towards a deeper 'yes' to God. ©

Register NOW!

Friday, October 20, 9am-3pm

Workshop for Priests,

Deacons and Pastoral Staff

Saturday, October 21, 9am-3pm

Workshop for Pastoral

Facilitators of Small Christian Communities

Fr. Art Baranowski and Theresa Doyle have worked together for 20 years and bring 50 plus years experience training Pastoral Leaders.

They will present from their new book "Eucharist at the Center: A Parish Structured for Evangelization." Here at Ascension Parish, 2950 N. Harbor City Blvd Melbourne, FL 32935; \$10 includes the cost of continental breakfast and lunch.

RSVP by Oct 17: ldodson@ascensioncatholicsch.org or 321-254-1595 ext. 3067

Don't miss this truly exciting opportunity!

AND

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Annual Day of Reflection

by the Space Coast Alliance of
Small Christian Communities with

Father Dave Pivonka, TOR,

The Wild Goose Is Loose!