

Today's readings remind us that we have two fundamental choices in life when the Lord asks something of us: obedience or rebellion. **What kind of future are you preparing for?** Jesus encourages us to think about the consequences of our choices, especially the choices and decisions that will count not just for now but for eternity as well.

The "rebellious" son told his father to his face that he would not work for him. But afterwards he changed his mind and did what his father commanded him. The "good" son said he would work for his father, but didn't follow through. Both sons disobeyed their father - but one repented and then did what the father told him. *"Which of the two did his father's will?"* **What's your opinion?** Jesus asks. *They all agree that it was the one who at first would not go but later did so...* **Jesus makes his point clear - Good intentions are not enough. And promises don't count unless they are performed.** The contradiction between what we believe and how we live is not a good thing. The second son in the parable impressed his dad with fancy words (Oh Certainly, sir) and a good show of healthy obedience, but did not go.

In the eyes of the priests and elders, the idea that tax collectors and prostitutes should enter the kingdom before them was *outrageous*. The very idea that such evil and immoral people should take precedence over the religious leaders in God's eyes would be totally unjust. The prophet Ezekiel in today's first reading is saying

exactly the same thing as Jesus and it's something we all need to listen to carefully. Someone who had lived a good life for a long time but in the end turned bad would "die in his sin". On the other hand, someone who had lived a very immoral life for a long time but turned round and accepted God at the end would live. And Jesus is applying this, first of all, to his listeners since they had a long tradition of following God's Law but now, faced first with John the Baptist and then with Jesus, the Son of God, ***they refused to listen***. On the other hand, Gentiles who had lived godless or idolatrous lives for generations are now turning to Jesus and opening themselves to his teaching and his healing power.

The religious people were the ones who serve in the Temple, study the sacred Scriptures, preach to the crowds, rule and govern God's Chosen people. They claim to be God's close collaborators, the ones who are following God's commandments better than anyone else; and yet, these are the very ones who fail to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Sinners and social outcasts on the other hand, like tax collectors and prostitutes, do recognize Jesus; they believe in him, and they repent from their sin.

Why are the religious leaders unable to see the truth? Why do they, like the second son in the parable, say that they are God's followers, but then refuse to obey the Messiah of God? They refused to listen; they did not

change their minds and believe in John the Baptist neither in Jesus"

We have to see what this incident is saying to our own Christian lives here and now:

- God always accepts us where we are. His love and his grace are always available but they can be rejected and spurned. And we can "die in our sin".
- On the other hand, no matter how far we have strayed from God; no matter how depraved we have become, it is never too late to turn back and we can be absolutely sure that a warm, no-questions-asked welcome is waiting for us.

We are among the small percentage of Catholics who come to Sunday Mass - we are the ones who appear, who seem to be following the Lord but our worship only have meaning if it is accompanied by conversion, a conversion expressed in serving others and obeying the Commandments. We go to Mass every Sunday; But what about the other Sacraments? Take a look at your life. Do you fulfill all the Commandments? Do you do works of mercy? Do you help others? Do you think about the salvation of your soul? Do you pray? Do you give others a good example of Christian life? Are you perhaps committing sins of omission? The Gospel gives a clear standard of coherence: "If you love me you will keep my Commandments." As today's Psalm reminds us, God is our "Savior," he is full of "mercies," he "shows sinners the way," and "teaches the humble his way." He will

strengthen us with his own strength, if we come frequently to him in the Eucharist. He will pour his healing mercy into our souls, if we open them up to receive it by going to confession. He will enlighten our confusion with his wisdom, if we spend time each day reading our Bibles and praying.

Let's live with integrity our lives, being whole and undivided, being honest and having strong Christian values. Let's be people of prayer, of honesty and truth, people who others can count on.

*"Lord Jesus, change my heart that I may only desire that which is pleasing to you. Help me to respect your will and give me the strength, joy and perseverance to carry it out wholeheartedly."*