

26th Sunday of the Year A

First Reading Ezekiel 18:25-28

The word of the Lord was addressed to me as follows: "You object, 'What the Lord does is unjust.' Listen, you House of Israel: is what I do unjust? Is it not what you do that is unjust?"

When the upright man renounces his integrity to commit sin and dies because of this, he dies because of the evil that he himself has committed. When the sinner renounces sin to become law-abiding and honest, he deserves to live. He has chosen to renounce all his previous sins; he shall certainly live; he shall not die."

Second Reading Philippians 2:1-5

If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing which would make me completely happy. There must be no competition among you, no conceit; but everybody is to be self-effacing. Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead. In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus.

Gospel Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, 'My boy, you go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not go,' but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, 'Certainly, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?" "The first," they said. Jesus said to them, "I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, a pattern of true righteousness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him."

Meditation

The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel introduced a new insight. It is not only the nation as a whole that must make moral choices and suffer their consequences. Every person must decide to obey or disobey the word of God spoken in the Law and the prophets; and every person must take the consequences. In that sense, judgment belongs to the one who makes the choice, not to the God who accepts it. We are fair or unfair to ourselves. Both prophet and evangelist remind us that no choice is definitive except the final one. The son may say one thing now and do another later. In fact, most of us have played both the first son and the second: we have made commitments we have not kept and kept commitments we had not made. Our lives are always in the making through the process of decision. Yet we shape ourselves gradually into one consistent pattern of obedience or disobedience by the choices we make. The gospel, echoing many an Old Testament passage, suggests that it is not we alone who are affected by the outcome. In the parable, the man is father to both sons.

In the story of Jesus, God is parent to the chief priests and elders as well as to the tax collectors and prostitutes. He sends the word of salvation to them both. We can imagine the father standing at his door awaiting the return of both the sons he sent to the vineyard. And only one appears.

Whatever our past choices, today's message is clear: now is always the time to repent and believe. No one is so urgent about our decision as the God who has given us both the choice and the power to make it in Christ Jesus. "Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked?"

Do I not rather rejoice when he turns from his evil way that he may live?" (Ezk 18:23).