

October 4, 2020 – 26th Sunday In Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners:

In the parable of today's Gospel, the first son had told his father that he would not go out to the vineyard and work there, but afterwards changed his mind and went. The younger son had said he would go, but did not go. The first son, according to the parable, represents tax collectors and prostitutes, while the younger son does the chief priests and elders of the people. Here going out to the vineyard means that one believes Jesus as the Messiah and accepts his message.

We need to ask why these sons changed their minds and didn't as they had initially answered.

At Jesus' time, the Israelites were waiting for a political messiah who could liberate them from the Roman ruling. The chief priests and the elders were religious leaders, and they believed that they would be praised by the messiah for having taught the people laws and precepts and kept the sacrificial rituals intact. They naturally anticipated to be given high positions in the kingdom that he would reign. Since that's what they were expecting from the messiah, they answered, "I will go to the vineyard, that is, I will accept the messiah." However, to their disappointment, Jesus came to talk about the spiritual kingdom, not the worldly kingdom, and rebuked them for their hypocritical life and legalism. Thus, they refused to accept him. They even persecuted Him and killed Him.

Tax collectors and prostitutes also must have heard about the coming political messiah. They were branded sinners who were considered as scum of the society. It is most likely that they were in despair or lived defyingly against the people that condemned them. They must have believed that they would get punished by the messiah once he comes. They knew their life would become more difficult upon the arrival of the messiah. So, they did not wait for Him, just like the younger son in the parable. Then, Jesus came to treat them with compassion and promised God's merciful forgiveness to any sinner who sincerely repent his/her sins and have conversion of heart no matter how

sinful he/she might be. They thought it was too good to be true and humbly accepted the saving message of Jesus.

They were used to being ignored and scorned, and did not think they were worthy of God's love and mercy. They gratefully accepted the Jesus' invitation. Then, they gave up their sinful life, went to the Father's vineyard, and worked hard for His glory.

Who, then, are the first son and the younger son nowadays in our Church?

Today, the first sons are those who humbly acknowledge them as sinners. They are those who cannot even dare to look at the heaven. They do not think that they are worthy to ask for forgiveness, yet gratefully accept Jesus' forgiveness and love trusting in His compassion and mercy. On the contrary, the younger sons are those who do not think that they are sinners. Even if they say that they are sinners, they never believe it from their hearts. If they did, they would always keep themselves humble before God and before others. They are convinced that they have rights to God's graces and think they deserve to receive them. In other words, they are self-righteous people. Hence, they cannot experience God's mercy and, as a result, cannot work at God's vineyard as disciples of His mercy.

It is the first son who humbly accepted the saving message of Jesus with gratitude and joy. Let us try to live like him.

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