



Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A Readings & Background on the Gospel Reading

This Sunday's Readings

First Reading : *Ezekiel 18:25-28*

It is possible to turn from sin and preserve one's life.

Responsorial Psalm : *Psalm 25:4-9*

A prayer to God for mercy.

Second Reading : *Philippians 2:1-11* (shorter form *Philippians 2:1-5*)

Be like Christ who humbled himself and was exalted by God.

Gospel Reading *Matthew 21:28-32*

Jesus poses a question to the chief priests and elders on the meaning of obedience.

The context for today's Gospel is the *mounting tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders*.

Jesus has entered Jerusalem and overturned the money changers' tables in the Temple. Jesus has caught the attention of the religious authorities; the chief priests and *elders question Jesus about the source of his authority*. Jesus refuses to name for these religious leaders the source of his authority. Instead, *he questions the priests and elders through the parable* we hear in today's Gospel.

The answer given by the religious leaders is correct, but it convicts them for their failure to heed *the call of John the Baptist and for their inability to recognize the Kingdom of God*.

The situation Jesus poses is rather straightforward. Given the same task by their father, one son *asserts his disobedience in words, but then obeys in his actions*; the *second son obeys with his words, but disobeys in his actions*.

The question that Jesus poses is pointed and direct: *Which son did what the father wanted?*

All would agree that *"actions speak louder than words"* and that *even if his words were disobedient, the son who did the work as ordered did the father's will*.



Jesus' conclusion is also direct. The chief priests and elders, the ones who speak most often about God, **did not act accordingly. They did not respond to the message of repentance** announced by John the Baptist with a change of heart. Instead, John's message was heeded **by those one would not expect to repent—tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners.** **Because of their actions, these sinners will enter the Kingdom of God ahead of the religious leaders.**

Jesus could ask us the same question.

Do our words indicate our obedience to God? If not our words, do our actions?

God desires a full conversion of heart, that our actions (and our words as well) will give evidence of our love for God.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A Making the Connection (Grades 1, 2, and 3)

Gospel Reading : Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus poses a question to the chief priests and elders on the meaning of obedience.

Children are quite observant of inconsistencies between words and actions that they witness in other people. They may be slower to recognize their own inconsistencies, however, and need to be taught that deeds matter as much as words.

Materials Needed - None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. *Sometimes people **say one thing and do another**. Let's consider this example, which is a story that Jesus tells in today's Gospel.*



2. Choose three volunteers to act out today's Gospel as you read it. One child will be the father; the other two children will play the roles of the two sons.

Read aloud Matthew 21:28-30. Stop at this point and ask the question that Jesus asks the chief priests and elders: **Which of the two sons did what the father wanted?** (the first).

Finish reading today's Gospel, Matthew 21:31-32.

3. **What might have made the first son change his mind and do the work that his father asked?**
Why might the second son have said yes, but then failed to do what his father asked?
Have you ever done something similar? (Allow all reasonable answers.)
4. *Occasionally we don't do what we say we will do because we are forgetful or because we get distracted. Sometimes, however, we are simply being disobedient by doing what we want to do instead of doing what we have been asked to do.*
5. Say: *Jesus wants us to know that **it is not enough to say that we love God**. We must also act in ways that show our obedience to God.*
6. Conclude in prayer together for the strength to obey God in actions and with words.

Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A Making the Connection (Grades 4, 5, and 6)

Gospel Reading : **Matthew 21:28-32**

Jesus poses a question to the chief priests and elders on the meaning of obedience.

Many times a day **children change their minds about their choices**. Jesus teaches us that conversion requires a change of mind as well as a change of heart.

Materials Needed - none

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask the group to think about a time ***when they changed their minds about some everyday thing***. Invite them to name some examples. Ask them now to think about a time when they had a ***“change of heart”*** about something more important.
2. ***What is the difference between a “change of mind” and a “change of heart?”***
Which is more difficult?
Jesus told a parable that talked about how people sometimes change their minds as well as their hearts.
Let’s listen to this reading and see what Jesus was trying to teach us.
3. Invite one or more volunteers to read today’s ***Gospel, Matthew 21:28-32.***
4. ***Which son do you think the father was more pleased with? Why?***
Which response would you prefer from someone?
*Have you ever heard the expression “**Actions speak louder than words?**”*
5. ***To change one’s heart is to have a conversion. Conversion is about professing the right beliefs about God, but it is also about changing how one acts.***
Jesus wants us to be converted to God, to act in ways that express our love for God and other people.
6. Pray together for the strength to obey God in actions even while expressing love for God with words.



Pray together today’s psalm, Psalm 25, or the Lord’s Prayer.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A Making the Connection (Grades 7, 8 and 9)

Gospel Reading : Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus poses a question to the chief priests and elders on the meaning of obedience.

Young people at this age are alert to what they consider fake behavior. They are the first to catch discrepancies between what adults say and do. This Sunday's Gospel reminds all of us to be consistent in our words and actions.

Materials Needed - none

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask for volunteers to come forward to act out a short episode.
2. Explain that you will give each of them a sentence to recite but that their facial expression and body language should express the complete opposite of what they are saying.
3. Use the following:
 - a. I'm very happy. (Said with a frown/tears)
 - b. I'm moving as fast as I can. (said while moving very slowly)
 - c. Yes, I agree with you. (said while shaking his or her head No)
 - d. I think that's a great idea. (said while rolling his or her eyes)
 - e. I'm calm; I'm very calm. (said while moving in a frenzy)
4. Thank the volunteers and say: ***If our words and our actions do not match, people will not believe that we mean what we say. That's why we have the expression "actions speak louder than words."***
5. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tells a story about the relationship between words and actions.
6. Have a volunteer read aloud Matthew 21:28-32.
7. ***Which son do you think the father was more pleased with? Why? Which response would you prefer from someone?***
8. ***Each Sunday, when we come to Mass, we say what we believe about God's love for us and how we should love one another. When we leave the church after Mass, it is important that our actions match our words. What kinds of actions would match what we say at Mass? (Accept all reasonable answers.)***
9. Conclude by praying aloud the Act of Contrition, asking God to help us to match our words and our actions.



Or Pray together today's psalm, Psalm 25, or the Lord's Prayer.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A Family Connection

Gospel Reading : Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus poses a question to the chief priests and elders on the meaning of obedience.

The example Jesus poses in today's Gospel could have been taken directly from family experience.

Each of us can recall instances in which family members spoke one thing but then did another.

The point of Jesus' story is ***to show that our actions speak louder than words***, even with God.

As you gather as a family, ***talk about times when a family member said one thing and then did another.***

Acknowledge that sometimes the action taken displays a true change of heart.

Then read today's Gospel, Matthew 21:28-32.

Observe that ***Jesus faulted the religious leaders for not allowing John the Baptist's message of repentance to change their hearts and actions.*** The word we sometimes use this change of heart is *conversion*. **Jesus wants us to do more than pay lip service to the Gospel; he wants us to be transformed by his word.**



Pray together that your family will experience a conversion to God and show evidence of this in both actions and words.

Pray together today's second reading, Philipians 2:1-5.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Gospel Reading : Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus poses a question to the chief priests and elders on the meaning of obedience.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases

- Which of the two sons did the father's will?
- Tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you.
- My sheep listen to my voice, says the Lord; I know them, and they follow me.
- When the sinner renounces sin to become law-abiding and honest, he deserves to live.
- Remember your mercies, O Lord.
- His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself.
- Your word, O Lord, is truth: make us holy in the truth.

to the point

The two **sons represent two responses to God's command**. The first son – like the 'tax collectors and prostitutes' – ***initially refuses; however, the 'tax collectors and prostitutes,' in response to John's preaching, changed their minds (like the first son) and entered the kingdom of God.*** In response to Jesus' preaching, will the 'chief priests and elders' change their minds? Will we?

Connecting the Gospel to the first reading

In Ezekiel the life and death consequences of turning from sin are experienced in this life. Read in light of the gospel, these consequences are eternal – entering (or not) into the kingdom of God.

to Christian experience.

It is not our initial response to God's command that measures our obedience, but ultimately our actions.

Understanding Scripture

Two sons

This chapter of Matthew's Gospel (ch. 21) ***began with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.***

As Jesus enters into **controversy with the 'chief priests and elders' (21:28), he is on their home court. *The primary seat of their authority – the Temple – has its home in Jerusalem.***

In this **brief parable** Jesus employs the image of a father and two sons; it is a familial and personal image and **thus different from other images** we have so far encountered, such as king and servant (18:23-33 – Sunday 24) or landowner and hired labourers (20:1-15 – Sunday 25).

As Jesus makes clear in his explanation, ***the son who refuses the father's command but then changes his mind represents the 'tax collectors and prostitutes' (21:31); the other son who says 'yes' but disobeys represents the chief priests and elders.***

Note the implication of the **parable's use of the father-son image**: the chief priests and elders are brothers to the tax collectors and prostitutes! **Just making them members of the same family was insulting!**

Tax collectors and prostitutes were public sinners and were despised by the religious leaders for two reasons. First, their conduct was sinful: **tax collectors were widely suspected of cheating people, and prostitutes violated moral and ritual laws.** Second, **both were viewed as collaborators with the hated Roman occupiers**: taxes were collected for the Romans, and prostitutes largely serviced Roman soldiers. **Yet these sinners have the same father as the religious leaders.**

Moreover, the parable isn't impersonal or entirely contrived. Early in the gospel, as John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing, ***'the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him . . . and they were baptised by him in the river Jordan'***; among them 'many Pharisees and Sadducees [were] coming for baptism' (3:5-7).

Thus, these religious leaders said ***'yes' to John's call for repentance; but in their rejection of Jesus their actions said 'no.'***

In rejecting the teaching of both John and Jesus they have rejected the 'way of righteousness' (21:32).

To enter the kingdom they must change their minds about John, about Jesus, and even about tax collectors and prostitutes.