

Repentance Gospel Reading

Lectionary: 136 (26 OT A)

Matthew 21:28–32

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: “What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ He said in reply, ‘I will not,’ but afterwards changed his mind and went.

“The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, ‘Yes, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?”

They answered, “The first.”

Jesus said to them, “Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.”

Discussion Questions

1. The two sons give opposite answers to their father, but neither initially does exactly what his father wants. Does the first son get any credit for honesty (even though he was being sullen)? Does the second son get any credit for a good intention (even though he didn't fulfill it)? What is the significance of the fact that the first son (only) changes his mind?
2. Jesus says that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God *before* the chief priests and elders. How does this relate to the “last shall be first, and the first shall be last dynamic” of last week's gospel? How might the conversion of sinners not merely come before, but actually be instrumental in bringing about the conversion of others?
3. The first son says “I will not,” but ultimately does his father's will; the second says “Yes, sir,” but does not. What are some ways that Christians can resemble the second son? What might “saying yes” to God look like without actually doing what God asks?
4. Jesus specifically says of the chief priests and elders: “Even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.” He is describing the hardening of their hearts when others are converted. Why might seeing another person's repentance and conversion actually make our own repentance harder? How can we overcome this temptation?
5. What is the difference between remorse and repentance?
6. Is repentance something we feel, something we decide, or something we do? How are these three related?

Living Tradition

“Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.”

—James 1:22

“The Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, or even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them.”

—St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*

“Do not be ashamed to enter again into the Church. Be ashamed when you sin, but not when you repent.” [...] “See we have shewn five ways of repentance: first the condemnation of sins, next the forgiveness of our neighbours’ sins, thirdly that which comes of prayer, fourth that which comes of almsgiving, fifth that which comes of humility.” [...] “But by repentance I mean, not only to forsake our former evil deeds, but also to show forth good deeds greater than those. For, ‘bring forth,’ saith he, ‘fruits meet for repentance.’ But how shall we bring them forth? If we do the opposite things: as for instance, hast thou seized by violence the goods of others? henceforth give away even thine own. Hast thou been guilty of fornication for a long time? abstain even from thy wife for certain appointed days; exercise continence. Hast thou insulted and stricken such as were passing by? Henceforth bless them that insult thee, and do good to them that smite thee. For it sufficeth not for our health to have plucked out the dart only, but we must also apply remedies to the wound. Hast thou lived in self-indulgence, and been drunken in time past? Fast, and take care to drink water, in order to destroy the mischief that hath so grown up within thee.”

—St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 10 on Repentance*

Weekly Challenge: How to Do a Good Thing

Stage	What Happens	Principal Faculty
1. Apprehension of the good	“This is something good to do.”	Intellect
2. Practical judgment	“I ought to do this.”	Intellect
3. Intention [choose the end]	“I will do this good end.”	Will
4. Deliberation / counsel	“How can I accomplish this?”	Intellect
5. Election [choose the means]	“I choose these particular means of accomplishing that end.”	Will, informed by intellect
6. Command [put it into action]	“Do it now.” Intellect directs the subordinate powers	Intellect
7. Execution	Bodily/appetitive powers perform the act	Lower faculties
8. Completion	The intended good is actually completed.	

This week, take some time to examine the places where your “yes” to God has not yet become an action you are doing faithfully.

- What have I been saying “yes” to?
- What am I actually doing or not doing?
- Where is the breakdown that is keeping my actions from matching my intentions?
- What would true repentance look like here?