

26th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "A"

October 1, 2017

A Call to Accountability

Readings: Ezekiel 18:25-28; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32

Riddles can be cryptic, confusing, and less than straight forward. Jesus used them because he wanted to engage more than our hearts, but our minds as well. In today's Gospel, Jesus did not really ask a trick question, but a fairly straight-forward question. Who did the will of the master—the one who said he would work but chose not to, or the one who declined the invitation, but later changed his mind and went to work after all?

In the Gospel, the scribes were smart enough to say that what mattered most was the one who actually went into the vineyard. Talk is cheap. What matters are actions. The problem lies in the fact that the listeners did not realize that the riddle was referring to them. They were the equivalent of the worker who said "Yes," but never quite made it to the vineyard...something came up which simply could not wait.

"Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather humbly regard others as more important than yourselves." A hypocrite could never do this, because he is more concerned with looking good than being good.

One common problem in this area is when people say to themselves. "I know I fall short. I do not want to be a hypocrite, so I had better not have any opinion about right and wrong, good or evil, lest I be considered a hypocrite because I fall short." This attitude is as common as it is flawed. A hypocrite is not someone who sins; a hypocrite is the one who essentially denies the reality of sin in his or her own life.

We must strive to mean what we say and to say what we truly mean. That is far cry from falling short as a result of sin. That can happen to honest and sincere people who struggle, and yet still believe fully in the truth.

For example, a father could speak out to his kids against drinking or smoking even if he had made similar mistakes when younger. One does not need to be perfect before one speaks out. But, if we continually make excuses for our mistakes, blame them on others, not taking responsibility, then our words ring hollow. Do not criticize the language of others if you are unwilling to watch your own. Jesus did not ask for perfection, as much as the willingness to be perfected.

Nobody likes hypocrisy. If you call out another for private air travel on the government dime and then do precisely the same thing yourself, you will be seen as a hypocrite.

The best defense we have against saying or writing things that are challenging to others is by looking in the mirror at ourselves. This Gospel is a call to authenticity, not a call to perfection. It is 100% about accountability. Each of us is accountable, not only to the Lord, but to others. And if we embrace accountability as a foundational principle in our lives, we will be happier, we will be at greater peace.

We read in Proverbs: “Iron is sharpened by iron; one person sharpens another.”¹ This is how it works, and it is nothing to fear. More and more, I am hearing of Catholic Men’s Groups or Young Adult fellowships that incorporate accountability into their daily practice.

When members are struggling with issues of alcohol or appropriate use of computers and technology, they call a friend who will help them to remain accountable for their actions, giving them support, especially in great times of temptation. They do so, not because it is easy. Frankly, it can be uncomfortable. They do so because it works. May God grant each of us the strength to be accountable before His eyes, so that we may always do God’s will- not just in word, but above all in deed.

¹ See Proverbs 27:17