

Homily – Father Brad Neely
26th Sunday Ordinary Time, Cycle A
Sts Peter/Paul; Holy Trinity: Sep 25, 2011
Ez 18: 25-28; Phil 2: 1-11; Mt 21: 28-32

John the Baptist preached repentance to prepare his fellow-Jews for the new kingdom of God. The tax-collectors and harlots mentioned in today's Gospel listened to his advice and followed it. Most of them became followers of Christ. But the priests and elders did not listen to John, (see Matt. 3:7ff; Jn. 1:19), not even after they saw the conversion of the public sinners. They pretended to be fully interested in their heavenly Father's business, but in actual practice, they did their own will. This parable is a warning against hypocrisy. In other words,
beware of giving God lip service.

Archbishop Charles Chaput was interviewed recently about his reassignment from archbishop of Denver to the 9th Archbishop of Philadelphia. He was asked about his thoughts concerning Catholic responses to authority in this day and age. This is much like the Parable today, considering the two son's response to their father's authority. Archbishop Chaput's answer about his perception about Catholic responses to the authority attached to bishops--- and even that of the Church herself, was this:
"Baptism brings us into the Christian community, but our **fidelity** is determined by how we live our lives **after** baptism.

It we don't give ourselves to the Lord at Mass every Sunday, if we don't seek out the sacrament of penance, if we don't follow the teachings of the Church, if we rarely read the Bible, or pray, or support our parish and the wider Church with our time, talent, and financial resources – then we should stop imagining ourselves as 'faithful' . . ." (Joan Frawley Desmond)

Jesus, in the telling of the Gospel parable, warns those who would give lip service to the workings of God that one does so at their own peril. When we consider our own spiritual lives, the question we can ask ourselves is whether our actions ring true to our Catholic identity. If we are intimately baptized into the life of Christ, do we give proper response and weight to what Christ, through his Church, asks of us? Do we say "yes" with little intention of carrying through? Do we say "yes" and follow the "yes" up with action? In the Gospel parable, Christ points out that those who believe Him and follow that belief with actions congruent to it, are the ones who receive their heavenly reward.

We live in a time and culture where we are surrounded by all but a demand of affirmation of everyone and everything. The highest good can sometimes be considered

inclusion versus exclusion,
regardless of the reason.
Does this parable seem harsh?
We have been reading
many straight forward Gospels of late,
with seemingly no mincing of words.
I would say that this parable
does not reflect
harshness on God's part,
but rather, God's mercy.
God does not exclude anyone
from a heavenly reward.
What happens is that
people freely exclude themselves
through the disobedience
that comes through hypocrisy.

Why does Christ impart
this information to us?
It is always important to consider
why Jesus teaches what He teaches.
He doesn't, after all,
gather the chief priests and scribes together
to tell "knock-knock jokes."
He warns us about hypocrisy in the Gospel
because He loves us!
Love here does not mean God
pushing a mop to clean up
what we have no intention
of cleaning up ourselves.

Love means forgiveness
for those who are repentant---
have a desire to seek truth---
and exercise the free assent
to live--in their actions--that truth.
In other words,
those who hear the teaching of Jesus,
and are docile to conversion.
Remember that I do not
use the word docile here
in a negative sense,
but in a way describing the beauty
of relating to God,
attentive to the One who is all powerful,
and all *everything*.

And the word **conversion**
here is important as well.
Conversion comes from
the Latin-*vertere*---to turn.
When *vertere* is connected
to the prefix *con* for emphasis,
we end up with: *convertere*,
a "strong turning."
So as we are attentive
to the authority of God,
and what God asks of us,
we are to respond with *conversion*,
or a *strong turning* in that direction.

It is prudent that we listen seriously
to what Christ wishes to impart to us
through His revelation,
as reflected in His Word.