

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
1st October 2023 - 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year A): 1st: Ezekiel 18:25-28. 2nd: Philippians 2:1-11. Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32.

How often have we said we'll do something, but haven't done it? Sometimes we might be agreeing to an activity to be polite, with no intention of doing it. Sometimes we genuinely forget. At other times we might agree to take part in something or do something for someone with the very best of intentions and a determination to do what we say. But then events take over, things change and get in the way, and we don't complete the task.

The message of today's parable can be boiled down to the phrase 'actions speak louder than words' (but words and actions would have pleased the father more).

We profess our faith and say yes at Mass, but how do we live out our faith in daily living?

Modern Western society likes to try and remove all religion and faith from affairs of state and day-to-day living, making it private, nothing to do with anyone else. The use of scripture as a basis is questioned and ridiculed by many looking at various issues that face us today. Good to remind ourselves on St Jerome's day of his saying 'Ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ.'

The context of where and when Jesus is speaking matters. Jesus is in Jerusalem now for the last time and in the Temple. The air is crackling with tension like a thunderstorm about to break.

The major area of controversy is the authority of Jesus. Who gave this untrained carpenter from Nazareth the credentials to teach people? This parable is part of the answer. By means of the story the Jewish leaders are invited to see themselves; how they may have had the right credentials and all the nice words, but they were not doing what God wanted. The 2 sons represent two groups of people and answer the question which just precedes the gospel passage which is about John the Baptist's authority.

The first group are the sinners who repent at the preaching of John and the second Israel's leaders who refuse the Baptists' message even when tax collectors and prostitutes respond to him.

By following John's way of righteousness the former do the will of the father. They heard John's call to conversion and acted – they changed.

As John said he would, Jesus came with the Holy Spirit and fire. He reached out to the sick and the sinner, the downgraded and depressed, the marginals and outcasts. He brought healing and uplifting, an end and a beginning, tears of relief and meals of celebration. The self-preserving Pharisees could not take it, for you cannot put new wine into old wineskins. Jesus was a scandal in their eyes.

To be a follower of Jesus we are called to be missionary and apostolic: sent to work in his fields.

The Christian mission can be described with simplicity: the best way to be a friend of Jesus is to **bring a friend** to Jesus. On God's farm today the harvest is huge.

Vast numbers of lives have not been touched by the news of Jesus and so are wandering down aimless roads of no meaning: they are bored, angry, and aggressive: they are jaded and sick from sensuality.

Of those that formerly did hear of Jesus, for many the little experience of religion they received was so negative that it really immunised them from the real thing.

The power of the Holy Spirit and the fire of the heart have not reached them.

When people are down and depressed, the last thing they want to hear is condemnation.

What they need is a hand reaching out to pick them up; to give them hope.

Who can bring them hope? **We can as we say 'Yes' to God's will and do it!**