

## **Parish of the Divine Love**

**Homily Sunday September 27, 2020**

**Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32; Psalm 25: 1-8; Philippians 2: 1-13; Matthew 21: 23-32.**

**Let's practice Obedient faith, not casual agreement.**

**May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my hearts be acceptable to you O God, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.**

Good morning church! In this last Sunday of September, we offer our worship, ourselves and our world to God and we ask God to equip us for all good things to the glory of God's name.

In today's gospel, we read about the chief priests and the elders who wanted to challenge Jesus. They didn't like how he was connecting with those who in their society had been tossed aside, they didn't like how Jesus was seeing people's pain and acting to heal, they did like how he set aside the rules in favor of acting out of concern for the truth. So, they asked him a question about the source of his authority not because they wanted so much to know the answer but because they wanted to get him into more trouble. Instead of answering their trick question he lobs the ball back into their court.

Jesus asks them about where the baptism "that John proclaimed" came from. It was an equally tricky question, they couldn't answer, not because they didn't know the truth but because they were afraid of the consequences of their answer. Jesus refuses then to play their game. In the next section Jesus uses a parable to help them understand his way in the world. Jesus shows them that the son who says no at first but then does what the father asks does the right thing. Jesus teaches that there is time to change your mind, there is time to get it right, there is time to do what God is calling you to do. There is time to change your actions, there is time to move from judgement to compassion, from rules to justice.

There's no doubt that Jesus' authority came from God. What he says and does have all been sanctioned and approved by God. The temple belonged to God and therefore, and the Son of God was absolutely endowed by the authority to do whatever he wanted to do with the Temple to reflect God's approval or disapproval. The office of the priests, as well as that of the high priests, is in essence a spiritual office, and therefore can only be sanctioned by God. But these people had confused and replaced God's authority with worldly and human authority; they had run the Temple in the way they saw fit, approving and disapproving whatever suited them. They had used their authority to oppress people with offerings and sacrifices they could not afford and demanded obedience without question. They were peddling God's word and running Temple functions by their own authority, thinking to sidestep God. But Jesus didn't let them get away with it! He rebuked them for their corruption and their abuse of God's Temple. Especially, he rebuked them for abusing their authority to lord it over people.

Sometimes people, even Christian people, think they have authority because of their seniority or because of the special privileges they enjoy in the Temple. But real authority can only come from God! And God bestows spiritual authority not according to human abilities or human privileges, but according to the measure of faith one has and according to the word of God living in a person's heart and expressed through one's life. So often Temples of God have been damaged because of those who think they are privileged with authority based on human factors and based on the sacrifices they have made in God's name. But God does not work like this at all! God needs not answer anyone. He isn't in the

habit of discriminating the way religious or worldly people do. God is righteous and God is just and so God gives authority to those who are inwardly broken with humility and with obedient faith to his will. These Temple priests' people were sinning against God in their thoughts, in their behavior, when they questioned Jesus' authority. What they were saying is that their own authority was superior to God's!

Jesus was talking about the Pharisees who thought they were spiritual. They really thought they were being obedient to God because they tended to the temple, because they recited verses, because they prayed and offered sacrifices. They were happy that they were not like the others who had walked away from God and from doing what God wanted them to do. But they were deceiving themselves to think that they were in good standing with God. However, it was just the opposite! Jesus says that they were arrogant and proud and even blind to see themselves and what they'd become! What's the will of God for them and for us and for everyone? When the time comes for them to obey God's voice, to repent and to humble themselves, the truth is that they simply didn't. actually, they closed their heart and decided not to listen.

People are sometimes just like them in the world. How many think they are in good standing with God because they say yes to God. Actually, it's easy to say yes. But doing what God wants us to do isn't so easy. It usually takes a hard decision to go against what we want to do and to do what God would like us to do. The one who said yes, looked like he was obedient, but his heart wasn't. He missed the chance to please his father. He was right to think that he was a loved son by his father. But he was wrong to think that there would be no consequences to how he behaves, what he says and what he does. He was also really foolish because he never considered repenting for his bad attitude towards his father. Jesus really teaches us in this parable what God wants; he wants obedience. And he also teaches us that obedience isn't a matter of words, but of actions.

What did his father expect second son to do? Look at verses 31-32. "Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.'" God sent Jesus to all of us to show us the way of righteousness! Why? Because without righteousness no one can have salvation or enter God's kingdom. And the way of righteousness is this: To repent of our rebellious hearts and minds and to put our faith in Jesus' gospel of his death and resurrection which alone has the power to change a rebellious heart and make it obedient and fruitful to God. Our father wants us humble and obedient to his teachings and will. It's the way of righteousness! God also wants us to serve him in his vineyard, bearing the fruit he asks for. All his sons and daughters have been called to serve him, especially in the work of sharing the gospel, in spreading his word, in teaching it, and in raising disciple and disciple makers for his kingdom. But we need obedient faith, and not casual agreement and then laying back. Praise God for his grace which helps us not only to say "yes" to God but to do as he says as well.

May we have the courage to live lives of compassion and justice. May we have the wisdom to change our minds for the sake of the gospel. As God invites us to once again to see, accept, actualize, and respond to God's amazing grace and live into the future that God has prepared for us.

**Amen**