

St Pius-St Anthony 26th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

Our first reading from Ezekiel about humans and our complaint to God about things not being fair, wouldn't that have made a good opener to last week's parable too, over the unfair vineyard pay? Yet, maybe our complaint to God may fit every Sunday? Huh? Oh, everyday, God may say! God is so much better than this, but He could easily say to us, "My world not fair? How is the world of your making working out?" But between that first reading and the gospel where Jesus similarly lays down a caution specifically to the chief priests and elders about their opportunity to 'hear the bell' and get on board before the last train leaves, I couldn't help but think of this great story lesson told about a Boy Scout walking along a trail. He came across a snake curled up in the path, and the snake said, "Please help me, help me, it has gotten so cold and I move so slow, I can't get back to my nest, please carry me along inside your coat. The boy said, "No, you are a snake, I've been told about you, you are dangerous." Snake said back, "No, it's because it's so cold: I need your help. I will die not being able to get back to my nest." So the boy picked up the snake, putting him in his jacket and walking on. A little later, warmed up, the snake hissed, "This is good enough, thank you. You can let me down now." And the boy did, letting the snake down to ground, and right then the snake bit him. Shocked, the boy said "What? I helped you, why did you do that?" Snake said, "That's on you. You knew what I was, when you picked me up."

So, our gospel has Jesus giving a short warning parable primarily addressed to the chief priests and elders (verse 21:23), but we can all learn from it. This parable is about two sons (curious detail is that this parable begins with same words as that other more popular parable-Luke 15:11, and they both share same lesson that both sons, (each in different ways) but both defy their father's will, with the same result that they both try it their OWN WAY. The point of it is to pierce through our selfish demand to do it our way-on our time. Interestingly in the parable, both sons don't do what they say (which tells me this parable is about actions not words-one can talk all day, but what a person does is what you count on). Each son goes about doing just what he wants. And I think Jesus is telling his generation (and us) that one can do that-but He adds that such selfishness won't get you anywhere near entering the Kingdom of God. Because, what a shock it must have been to hear Jesus say (again to the chief priests and elders), "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you." And as if the priests and elders still aren't getting the message,

Jesus says, “Did you notice that when John Baptist preached repentance, the tax men and prostitutes converted. How successful had you chief priests been in reaching them? Shouldn’t that tell you priests/elders something or give us all something to think about?” That shocker quote of Jesus brings up another detail that jumped out at me. When He began this parable, He said, “What is your opinion?-A man had two sons...” (21:28 followed up by another question ‘Which did Father’s will’ in verse 31). Jesus really wants to know what they think (wants them to think themselves) When was the last time we experienced that? Anymore, like in a lot of media interviews or public talk, someone is asked a question, the person gets started answering and the interviewer talks over them. Or after a presentation, there is opened a question and answer period and people raise their hands and just talk and talk and talk (I hear it even now-me). But where are the questions? I think a good personal bible study (I need to do this) is to read the gospels and write out a list or outline of the questions that Jesus asks people. That would make a good study and a good prayer answering them to Him.

Yet, looking at the parable itself again, how many of us can see ourselves, likely in both sons? I can’t number the times I have ‘yessed’ my way through a parental request, ‘Would you make sure the back yard gets mowed? Would you be sure your brother’s bike tire gets aired up? Would you sweep the leaves off the front porch?’ Of course, I say yes, and then I’d rather play another game, call a friend, shoot some baskets, or just keep vegging in the bean bag. But also and to better follow the lesson of the parable, hopefully more times, I’ve been asked something and straight up say ‘no way-no-no chance’, to only then think about it a little, and feel regret for saying it after I recall everything-which is everything, my mom and dad do for me, and then come around and get on to doing the task following through-completing their request? Again, in the parable, both sons don’t end up doing what they say. But the better response of the two is the one who does, end up following through to complete the job-as scripture says ‘fulfilled the Father’s will’ regardless of what he said. So where does this leave us? 1) Watching what we say, 2) doing what we say, and 3) being big enough to come around (convert-change our mind) if we have given a wrong reply. A good place to start I think is with the question itself, the request from God. God tells us: “Go out in the vineyard and work”. What do we do?