

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

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

There's a funny story about a father who called his three children together. He put a brand-new toy in the middle of the floor and said, "I won this as a door prize, and I want to give it to the one who is the most obedient. Who always obeys Mommy and does everything she says?"

The children sat in silence for a moment.

Then one of the children picked up the toy, handed it straight to his father, and said, "Congratulations, Dad! You win!"

The children may not have fully understood the word "obedience," but they understood what it looked like.

And that is the message of today's Gospel: obedience is not just about what we say. It is about what we do.

I'm reminded of another story about a minister who left the ministry after 20 years and became a funeral director.

When people asked him why he changed jobs, he said, "I spent ten years trying to help John quit drinking, and he's still an alcoholic. I spent three years trying to help Harold and Susan with their marriage, and they got divorced. I spent two years helping Bob kick his drug habit, and he's still addicted. But now, at the funeral home, when I straighten them out, they stay straight! Perfect obedience!"

We laugh at that, but there is a serious point: God does not want forced or empty obedience from us. He wants a living and loving relationship with us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us about a father with two sons. Neither son was perfect. The first son says, "No, I will not go to the vineyard." But later, he changes his mind and goes.

The second son says, "Yes, sir," but he never goes.

Then Jesus asks, "Which of the two did his father's will?"

The answer is clear: the first son.

He had a bad beginning, but he had a good ending.

And that is the beautiful message of today's Gospel: with God's help, we can turn a "No" into a "Yes."

The Bible is full of people who did exactly that.

Peter denied Jesus, but later became a great witness of Christ.

Paul persecuted Christians, but later became one of the greatest apostles.

Augustine lived a very worldly life, but later became a great saint and teacher of the Church.

So whenever we realize that we have made a mistake and decide to change, we are in very good company.

And none of us stays exactly the same.

Some of us are getting taller. Others are getting shorter.

Some are losing weight. Others are putting it on!

Some are getting richer, and most of us are getting poorer!

But the same thing is true of our spiritual life.

Our faith is not just a list of prayers we learned when we were young. Our faith is a living relationship with God.

And that relationship is either growing or fading.

So, where is our vineyard?

The father in the Gospel says, "Go and work in my vineyard today."

For parents, the vineyard is the family and the home.

For young people, it is school, friendships, and the choices they make.

For all of us, the vineyard is the people God puts in front of us—the spouse who needs extra patience, the neighbor who is lonely, the elderly person who needs a visit, or even the family member who has hurt us.

It is easy to say "Yes" here in church:

"Yes, Lord, I love you."

"Yes, Lord, I forgive."

"Yes, Lord, I will follow you."

But the real test comes when we walk out those church doors.

Do our actions match our words?

Can we say, "I forgive you," and still hold bitterness in our hearts?

Can we say, "I love God," but refuse to speak to someone in our own family?

Can we say, "I trust God," but live every day in fear and worry?

Our faith has to move from our lips, to our hearts, and then into our actions.

And the good news is this: a wrong beginning does not have to mean a wrong ending.

Maybe we said "No" to God yesterday.

Maybe we neglected our prayer.

Maybe we lost our temper.

Maybe we fell back into an old habit.

But today is a new day.

God does not lock us into our past.

We can begin again.

So today, let us ask ourselves one simple question:

Where is God asking me to turn a "No" into a "Yes"?

Maybe it is making that phone call to someone who is lonely.

Maybe it is saying, "I'm sorry."

Maybe it is saying, "I forgive you."

Maybe it is spending five quiet minutes in prayer tonight.

Whatever it is, let us not be afraid.

God is not asking us to be perfect. He is asking us to have a willing heart.

Let us bring our faith from our lips into our actions.

And when the Lord says to us, "Go and work in my vineyard today,"

may we answer not only with our words, but with our lives:

"Yes, Lord. I'm on my way."

Amen.