

Homily for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A, 9/27/2020

Today's readings are really a challenge, especially the Gospel reading describing the two sons. One son said yes to working for his father but never did and the second said no to his father and actually worked for him. **When you think about this Gospel one of the greatest things one can give another person is one's word.**

Some people are very generous with their word. They will promise you the sun, the moon and the stars. But you can't rely on them They don't really mean it. Their word is worthless. Their promises melt like salt in water. How painful it is to deal with such people. There is probably no one here who has not been let down by someone who has not keep his/her word. But there are others who are slow to give their word because they don't make promises easily. When they say they will do something, they do it. What a joy it is to deal with such a person.

When the father in Jesus's story asked his two sons to go and work in the vineyard, one said he would go but never helped in the vineyard. He gave his solemn word that he would go but sadly he didn't keep his word and he didn't go. The other son also gave his word. He said he wouldn't go but he changed his mind and went.

Jesus was not holding either son up as an ideal. Yet, we can learn from both. The son who said he would go but didn't is meant to be a warning for us. We can call ourselves Christians but outsiders sometimes accuse us of being hypocrites because our lives do not always witness to the faith we profess with our lips.

I think we can learn from the son who said "no" but later changed his mind. To change one's mind is generally regarded as a fault and a weakness. But not in this case. It takes humility to admit one's mistake, and courage to put it right.

The second son, because he finally obeyed his father, is a lot better than the first. The ideal son, however, would be the son who immediately and willingly obeyed the father's wishes. That is what we should aim at. Jesus is the ideal Son. As St. Paul in the second reading today says: *"He emptied himself and became obedient to the point of death, death on a cross."*

This parable teaches us that promises can never take the place of performance, and fine words can never be a substitute for fine deeds. Faithfulness is one of the greatest and most necessary things in life. But faithfulness is costly. It is not an easy road. It demands unselfishness and a spirit of sacrifice. But even here on earth it brings great reward in terms of growth, serenity and joy. There are no such rewards for the unfaithful. There is no happiness at the end of the day for the one who gives his word but fails to honor it. But there is great joy for one who give his word and honors it.

Finally, it is said that a person is as good as his word. If that is so, then the question I must ask myself is how good is my word?