



Twenty Sixth Sunday Ordinary Time 2005

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

The readings today describe the behaviour of the disciple. Chapter 18 of Ezekiel is about personal responsibility. In Ezekiel's world there are no shades of grey when it comes to behaviour. He speaks only of the virtuous or the wicked. The virtuous are those who follow God's way. The wicked are those who do not.

The important message is that we are responsible for our own actions. As a child can't blame a parent for its actions, neither can a parent blame a child.

God, says Ezekiel, has no memory. A life of wickedness is wiped out when the person turns to God. That means God is not concerned with what we did at eighteen or fifty. It's where our heart is now that matters.

According to Ezekiel if God shows a preference it is for the poor person who struggles with a weakness ahead of the good person who gives up a life of virtue for a passing fancy.

Ezekiel was a prophet of the exile so his message is uncompromising. If the people were to retain their faith and culture they could not afford to be half-hearted. What do we make of this message today? Are we being true to the message of Vatican II in times when many seek to return to understandings of church which are out of sync with the Gospel.

Matthew has Jesus offering a case study for us to reflect on.

Once a vineyard owner told his two sons about the work required of them. To the elder he said, "Go into my vineyard today." The elder son said, "I'm on my way." He never went to the vineyard.

The father said the same thing to his younger son. "Go to the vineyard today." The second son said, "No, I won't." Later he felt ashamed of his actions and went off to work. Matthew poses the question, "Who did the father's will?"

The answer is easy but the real question is why tell this story?

The vineyard was a common symbol in scripture for *God's place*. In the Gospels it usually signifies the reign or kingdom of God.

The sons stand as types of servant sons of God. The story is about kinship with God and with one another. It operates on several levels. When Jesus told the story the brothers were members of God's chosen people. They were confident of their privileged place in the scheme of things. In Jesus' time some had used this position to make aliens even of their own people.

When Matthew used this story in the community he was addressing the attitudes that had been observed. Some disciples were considering themselves as superior to others perhaps because of a presumed piety or by virtue of the length of their commitment. Today we look at our own attitudes, especially towards those we feel are not as committed as ourselves.

Look at the great hymn of Philippians 2. It is offered as a model of Christian service.

Jesus, although he could claim a special relationship with God which could set him apart, chose solidarity with all humankind without exception. He accepted the ups and downs of an ordinary life. He accepted the suffering that it entailed, although, like us, there were times when he wished to avoid it.

When it came to his death, he prayed for courage and made his last moments an act of loving surrender. Fidelity in all things made him a model for us.

All creation now honours him as Christ the Lord.

Interestingly enough the early church did not think that such a picture would make us feel inadequate, rather they hoped that the simplicity and ordinariness of Jesus' life would inspire us to imitate it.

St. Paul reminds us of the love we owe one another. We need to be supportive of each other in discipleship sharing a common spirit that encourages us and sustains us.

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