

Homily for the 26th Sun in OT A (September 25, 2011)
Sacred Heart
Salisbury, NC
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We have in the Gospel today two disobedient sons. The first who told his father that he would not go to work, who outright rejected the father's will, but later did go to work in the vineyard. And the second son who responds to the father with an enthusiastic "Yes, Sir," but then doesn't go to work. He doesn't do what he agreed to do. So the first son changes his original "NO" to a YES by going into the vineyard, by fulfilling the father's will. But the second son changes his original YES, his original embracing of the will of the father, to a profound NO by refusing to go into the vineyard. Each man experienced a conversion, one that was good, and one that was not.

In the reading today from the prophet Ezekiel, we also hear of two conversions, two changes of heart. Having heard the complaint that the way of the Lord, the justice of God, is unfair, the Lord speaks to his people through the prophet. He says that if a virtuous person turns from the life of virtue to commit iniquity, which is a fancy way of saying to commit sin, then for that sin there will be punishment, and that

punishment is death, for Scripture says that the wages of sin is death.

But there is opportunity for another conversion. The Lord also says that if the person turns from his wickedness, and does what is right and just, then he will preserve his life. True Conversion leads us from the way of sin and death to the way of life. The first son in the parable experienced a true conversion. He turned from his disobedience, he turned from his wickedness and did what was right and just, fulfilling the Father's will.

As we live out our Christian vocation, as married or single, consecrated religious or clergy, we are invited each day by our heavenly Father to work in his vineyard. And we are called to put on the mind of Christ, as our reading from Philippians reminds us. We are to make present in the world, in our neighborhood, the joy, mercy, compassion, and love of Jesus Christ. And for all of us this is a call to conversion. This is a call to true discipleship, and for that we need a model of conversion and discipleship.

But my brothers and sisters, neither of those two sons can be taken as a good model for us in our Christian discipleship. True, one did the father's will, and we rejoice for him as we are called to rejoice for all

who come to work in the Lord's vineyard, even after years of disobedience. But for both of these men their words did not correspond to their actions. What they said with their mouths they did not confirm with their hands. And here we are not talking about weakness; we're not talking about falling into sin in the face of strong temptation. Here we are talking about a divided mind and heart. . . about living a life disconnected from what we profess. We are talking about our inner convictions being lived out in our daily lives. We are, in fact, brothers and sisters, talking about the strength of our AMEN.

Each Sunday at Mass we respond Amen many times, and we do it so often that that it can become almost a reflex. How often do we say amen without even realizing it? But this response does not just mean that the prayer is concluded or the Sacrament received. The Amen is the way that the prayer of the priest becomes our own. It is how we say that we believe, and not just with our mind but with our whole heart and soul. Our Amen is to be an expression of our total conviction, our single-mindedness to the truths of our faith, to our participation in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and to our reception of the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity

of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in Holy Communion. Our Amen is our Yes to the Father's invitation to the vineyard.

And so my brothers and sisters, if we are to be good children of the Father, unlike the two in the parable, then what we say must correspond to how we live. The Amen that we say here must be lived out there. So if we are going to raise our voices in prayer begging the Lord to build up our lives and the lives of our family with his grace, then we cannot use that same voice to tear down the reputation of another. We cannot allow the hand that touches Holy Water to make the sign of the cross to be raised in violence. And we cannot use people as if they were things, and show affection for things as if they were people. That is not the mind of Christ that we are to put on, and it is not the living Amen that we are called to express. And I make no claims, my brothers and sisters, to speaking and living the perfect Amen. But I can point you to the one who did and who does.

From the cross our Lord Jesus, who perfectly fulfilled the Father's will, said to John and he says to us "Behold your Mother." It is to Mary the Mother of Jesus, the refuge of Sinners, the Queen of the Apostles,

and the Help of Christians, that we are to look as the perfect model of discipleship. May we present our need for conversion, our difficulties in living our Amen, along with all our cares and concerns so that Mary, with a mother's love, can prepare us to labor in the vineyard of the Father. AMEN.