

26th Sunday A (Matt 21:28-32)

Has anyone here ever made a mistake? I think I've made a few in my life. I guess everyone has. Nobody's perfect. Mistakes can happen only if people make decisions- or if they never make decisions, and perhaps that's a bigger mistake. Some decisions may be trivial and may affect our lives very little; other decisions can have momentous consequences. The prophet Ezekiel in our first reading speaks of the most serious and significant decision any of us can face in our lives, the decision to turn away from sin and selfishness and do what is right and just toward our neighbor. In making this decision we make a decision for life and not for death, the life that comes from being totally loved by our loving God, and allowing ourselves to bask in that love and to share it with others.

This kind of decision, like all major decisions, must be made with responsibility. None of us is exempt from the human obligation of taking personal responsibility for our decisions. There are some people, perhaps you may know one or two, who usually permit others to make major decisions for them, and thus they abdicate their own personal responsibility. Such irresponsible people may be like the elder son in today's Gospel from Matthew. He refused to take responsibility for carrying out his commitment to work in his father's vineyard after having said he would. In not being true to his word he proved himself unreliable, irresponsible, and untrue to his father, and above all, untrue to himself. He failed to be a person of integrity.

Jesus said of the second son, "Afterward, he regretted it and went." That sentence speaks of two things- an emotion and an action. "Regretted" is what the man felt deep down in his heart. "Went" is what he did with his two feet. Both of those are necessary, if the desired change is to take place. Regret serves one constructive purpose and only one. That is to set in motion a process of correction. Until and unless that result is produced it is a totally wasted emotion.

Does a wife or a husband have any regrets about the way they have been treating each other? Have they taken their spouses for granted? Have they neglected their children? That can be changed, all of that, and it will need some positive action. As you may know, I work a lot with divorced people and I've learned that neglect, disregard, lack of respect, unforgiveness, fear of vulnerability and being hurt, and keeping emotional distance can be devastating for a marriage relationship.

The young man in our story was rude to his father and negligent of his responsibilities. Afterwards he regretted his refusal and went to work. The same option is open to you and me. We don't have to live with our mistakes forever, repeating them over and over again. Our regrets can motivate us to make some life giving changes. We can put our regrets to constructive use. The Lord Jesus is ready to help with his love and grace to give us courageous hearts. And for him, we give thanks in the Eucharist.

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