

10 October 2017 (26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Ezekiel 18:25-28; Psalm 24(25):4-9; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32.

Go and work in the vineyard today!

Jesus once again speaks to us through parables. Although this parable is not strictly speaking a parable of the kingdom of heaven (the kingdom of heaven is like) it still makes a reference to the kingdom.

Today's passage from the gospel according to Matthew is found after Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday, Mt 21:1-11) and therefore forms part of the last week of Jesus' life. Here he addressed the chief priests and the leaders of the Jewish people, who consistently refused to listen to his teaching.

Similar to last Sunday's gospel, Jesus speaks of a vineyard; once again people are invited to work in this vineyard. The vineyard represents the People of God and the kingdom of heaven. In both parables people (we) are invited to participate in the work that happens in the vineyard. The father in today's gospel invites his two sons to share in the vineyard. While first initially refuses, he then changes his mind and goes; the second accepts to go, but never goes.

In today's the parable the second son represents the Jewish leaders, who seem to have accepted to participate in the life of God by studying their scriptures, but then refused to listen to Jesus, the true word of God. The first son represents the 'sinners;' those who through their sinful way of life seem to have rejected God, but have in fact accepted Jesus' message.

Jesus invites everyone (us) to work in the Father's vineyard; he makes no distinction between 'saints' and 'sinners.' As we saw last week, those who accepted to work at the vineyard in the last hour still received a full reward for their labours. In God's eyes there are no saints or sinners, all are equally in need of his mercy. God's mercy is a gift given freely by God to all who accept it; without God's mercy, we cannot participate in the life of God. God invites us all and welcomes us to participate in his loving mercy. Our duty is to respond and accept God's invitation. We do not become holy by accepting God's invitation; when we accept to work in the vineyard, we start sharing in the life God gives us.

The mistake of the Jewish leaders was that they thought that by following the Law to the letter, they could make themselves holy and did not need to listen to Jesus' teaching. They thought they had no need for God's mercy because they could do it on their own. Those who society recognised as sinners knew they needed God's mercy; and they are the ones who participated in God's kingdom first.

We can easily fall into the same trap as the Jewish leaders. We may think that by praying regularly and coming to Church on Sunday we are making ourselves holy. When we try to live a good life we acknowledge and celebrate God's mercy towards us. We come to Church to thank God that he has invited us into his vineyard.

God is not worried that at times we may ignore or refuse his call. God is happy when we turn back and again accept his invitation. We know we often fall and fail in our response to God's call, that is when we need to look up and accept his loving mercy. The sacraments themselves, especially the healing sacraments of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick, heal us and give us strength on our journey.

Let us continue tirelessly in our work in the vineyard.

Fr Mario