

The 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A – 9/27/2026 – Msgr. Peter Quang Nguyen

First reading – Ezekiel 18:25-28: The Lord responds to those who complain about fairness. God's ways are just. A virtuous person who turns to iniquity will face consequences, but if they repent, their life will be preserved.

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 25: The psalmist seeks God's guidance and asks for instruction in truth. Remembering God's compassion, the psalmist asks for mercy and guidance. The Lord, good and just, leads sinners and the humble in righteousness.

Second reading – Philippians 2:1-11: Encouraged by Christ's love, unity, and compassion, we're urged to be of one mind, considering others above ourselves. Christ's selflessness and humility serve as an example, leading to exaltation and acknowledgment of His lordship.

Gospel – Matthew 21:28-32: Jesus presents a parable of two sons asked to work in a vineyard. One initially refuses but later obeys, while the other agrees but doesn't go. The lesson highlights that actions, not words, reveal true obedience and righteousness, and tax collectors and prostitutes enter God's kingdom due to genuine belief.

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“WORDS AND DEEDS”. At a certain parish, the pastor wanted to start a Bible study course on Sunday evenings. During the morning Mass, after explaining the benefits of Scripture, he asked the congregation for their opinion; more than half of those present raised their hands to agree with and support this pious initiative. However, at the evening Mass, when the pastor asked how many would actually attend the Bible study, the number of hands raised to sign up could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

This story reflects the attitude of a discrepancy between words and deeds—a theme Jesus addresses in today's Gospel through the parable of the father who invites his two sons to work in the vineyard. Neither son was truly exemplary from the start. The first son initially defied his father but later regretted it and went to work; the second son readily agreed but failed to follow through.

It must be stated at the outset that Jesus is not advocating for stubborn refusal followed by eventual conversion; rather, He cherishes those who, having erred, feel remorse and return. This reveals that God does not view us as static or “frozen” in time, but rather as beings who are “in the process of becoming.”

The essential element is human conversion: feeling remorse for a misguided attitude and, upon realizing this, desiring to change. This is clearly evident in the Lord's words: “But later he changed his mind and went.”

The parable of the “two sons” also highlights the contrast between “saying” and “doing”—between saying “yes” with one's lips while saying “no” through one's actions. Ultimately, this underscores the contrast between belief and unbelief. Jesus calls upon us to say “yes” through a “living” faith. That ‘yes’ of faith is often a ‘conversion, a renewal of life.’

Reflecting on the attitudes of the two sons in the parable, we consider two points:

1. “A discrepancy between words and deeds”
2. “No one strikes the one who returns; one strikes only the one who runs away.”

1. A discrepancy between words and deeds.

The parable is primarily addressed to the leadership—the Jewish chief priests and elders—as Jesus begins with the question, “What do you think?” and concludes with, “Truly, I say to you...”

Jesus wishes to highlight the differences between the Pharisees and scribes on the one hand, and the tax collectors and others on the other. Israel’s spiritual leaders persisted in a self-centered attitude that alienated them from God. They are likened to the second son, who spoke of doing the work but failed to carry it out:

In the society of Jesus’ time, the priests, leaders, Pharisees, and experts in the law managed to mislead public opinion, yet in reality, they had forfeited their place in God’s plan of salvation. Taking their place were tax collectors and prostitutes—people known to be violating God’s will as revealed in His law and commandments.

Like the Pharisees, there are those who appear pious, righteous, and diligent in religious observances; their words are full of apparent submission to God’s teachings, yet their actions show no sign of compliance with what He commands. Outwardly, they seem compliant, but in reality, they are unteachable. They may succeed in deceiving public opinion through their outward readiness to obey, but Jesus sees into the depths of the human heart. A sinner who acknowledges their sinfulness and repents when moved by grace is of greater worth than a devout person who clings to a veneer of piety yet, blinded by pride, fails to hear the supernatural call. Understood in this light, the parable reveals a particular severity and sternness toward those who are already "on the inside"...

Reflecting on the Jewish scribes prompts us to examine ourselves; often, we are the very second son in the parable. We, too, are inconsistent. We may profess to follow God with our lips yet fail to do so in our actions—committing adultery, theft, gambling, or drunkenness, and living without justice or charity in both word and deed. Some speak eloquently but fail to put their words into practice. Others appear outwardly pious yet harbor greed and deceit within their hearts...

There is a proverb: “*The quality of the wood matters more than the quality of the varnish.*” Jesus emphasizes a truly moral life—piety expressed through concrete deeds rather than empty words or outward appearances. “It is not those who cry ‘Lord, Lord’ who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who listen to and act upon the word of God who are worthy to share in that Kingdom.”

Fine words alone are insufficient. It is our actions that truly count, not merely our intentions. In this regard, Jesus’s message resonates deeply with the modern age: today’s world values effectiveness. People are skeptical of eloquent speakers—those who spout grand rhetoric—who merely intoxicate us with hollow declarations. Theoretical ideologies have lost all credibility; people judge promises based on tangible results.

2. One strikes the one who runs away, not the one who returns...

Our ancestors often said, “*One strikes the one who runs away, not the one who returns,*” meaning that no matter how grave a person’s errors may be, if they show genuine repentance, they will be met with compassion and forgiveness. Furthermore, repentance offers the opportunity to start life anew.

The figure of the first son serves as a warning against hardness of heart, religious pride, and a false sense of inner peace; he calls upon us to listen to God and heed His summons.

The prophet Ezekiel (in the First Reading) also warns those who consider themselves already virtuous and righteous—and thus cease striving to live better—to beware: should they fall into sin, they too shall face death.

Jesus's mission is to seek out the lost sheep first, rather than those who, while not lost, are not truly with the Shepherd. Jesus prefers to be present among sinners—offering forgiveness and healing—rather than among those who deem themselves righteous and in no need of repentance. He becomes a Light to peoples dwelling in darkness who—guided by a mysterious star—seek Him out, rather than to those who imagine themselves to be in the light yet remain indifferent or hostile toward Him. He goes to places where people bring Him all manner of ailments to be healed, rather than to those who approach Him seeking only to find fault, set traps, or harbor envy.

Jesus strongly calls upon those who hear His voice to repent and undergo transformation, remaining ready to change their lives in accordance with God's will. Only through repentance—acknowledging one's sinfulness—can one receive forgiveness; only through the humble admission of imperfection can one be filled with grace. Repentance is the essential prerequisite for embracing the Gospel. What matters is not the starting point, nor the past refusals, nor the accumulated transgressions that once constituted so many “no” to God. What matters is looking back at those “no” and transforming them into a “yes.” With God's grace, this is always possible.

Thus, Jesus brings us face-to-face with our own responsibility: whatever our past, whatever we may have previously refused, change is always possible. Jesus is the One who never imprisons anyone in their past; He offers everyone a chance—even the greatest sinner. For *“there is no saint without a past, and no sinner without a future...”* People can shift from “yes” to “no” and from “no” to “yes.” The value of a “no” or a “yes” lies not in the moment it is spoken, but in whether or not it is subsequently acted upon. Saying “yes” without acting holds no more value than saying “no” yet actually doing the deed. Promises alone do not establish a person's integrity; fine words cannot substitute for good deeds.

Lord Jesus, both sons in today's Gospel parable offer us a lesson: if we resemble the first son—having long said “no” to God—please help us now to say “yes”; and if we resemble the second son—having said “yes”—let us not waver and change that response into a “no” to God. Amen.