



Matthew 21:28-32

28 Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, 'What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, "My boy, you go and work in the vineyard today." **29** He answered, "I will not go", but afterwards thought better of it and went. **30** The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, "Certainly, sir", but did not go. **31** Which of the two did the father's will?' 'The first', they said. Jesus said to them, 'I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. **32** For John came to you, a pattern of true righteousness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.'

Other readings: Ezekiel 18:25-28 Psalm 24 (25) Philippians 2:1-11

The parable of the Prodigal Son, found only in the Gospel of Luke, also features his elder brother. It is of course a very well-known parable. Matthew's parable about two sons, which is our gospel reading today, is less well-known.

There is an obvious contrast between the son who initially refuses to respond and then thinks better of it and does his father's bidding, and the second son who promises to respond but in fact does nothing. Jesus himself explains the parable.

The parable is apparently addressed to the chief priests and the elders. Jesus points out that many religious people pledge their loyalty in words but do not follow this up with actions. Jesus had spoken in the Sermon on the Mount about those who say 'Lord! Lord!', but do not do the will of the Father (7:21). Such people are contrasted with the tax collectors and prostitutes in the parable, who, after initially refusing to respond, change their lives for the better.

The first reading from the prophet Ezekiel makes clear that we are asked to do God's will and persevere in it. It may take a long time for us to accept the truth and challenge of the gospel, but God is patient and seems to prefer to await our free response rather than endure pious words which are not backed up by acts.

Jesus also reprimands the religious leaders for their blindness. Even when they saw the tax-collectors and sinners responding to the preaching of John the Baptist, they still refused to change themselves. Jesus will later accuse the religious leaders of blindness and hypocrisy: 'Alas for you, blind guides!' (23:16)

Am I blind to the example of those I consider to be not as good as I am?

Am I willing to turn over a new leaf despite past failings?

We pray that we may respect the efforts of others even if they fail.

We pray for insight and understanding of ourselves and of our neighbour.