

September 27, 2026
26th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards he changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.

Background:

In the final line of last week's Gospel, Jesus declared that the last will be first and the first will be last (Matthew 20:16). As Matthew continues his Gospel from that point, he next describes Jesus' third and last prediction of his suffering and death, after which the mother of James and John approaches to ask that her sons sit on his right and left when Jesus comes into his kingdom, and the disciples' reaction to her request leads to Jesus' instruction on the use of authority. The 20th chapter in Matthew ends with Jesus healing a blind man.

The 21st chapter of Matthew begins with Jesus entering Jerusalem riding a donkey, and the crowds greeting him crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David." Then, Jesus enters the temple area and overturns the tables of the moneychangers and those selling doves to the pilgrims for offerings. The chief priests and the scribes confront Jesus. The following morning, as Jesus enters Jerusalem, he curses a fig tree because it has not borne fruit, and it dies immediately. As Jesus is teaching in the temple area, the chief priests and the elders question his authority. Jesus says that he will respond to their question if they will answer his question, from where did John the Baptist get his authority? This interchange with the chief priests and elders leads into the parable that is the text for today's Gospel.

Stories about two sons were a familiar way of making a point. The stories of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16) and Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:23-27:46) are two examples. The prophet Ezekiel tells the story of two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, who represent Samaria and Jerusalem in his story (Ezekiel 23:1-49).

In the Gospel, the son who refuses to go to work in the vineyard has broken with accepted norms of behavior and insulted his father, who would typically have the legal right to punish him and even put him to death.

Jesus is very shrewd in the way he phrases the question he puts to the chief priests and the elders. He does not ask which son has honored his father. People of the day valued honor more than obedience. To their way of thinking, the son who only said he would work in the vineyard was more honorable than the one who said he would not. It may be helpful to know that there are no private conversations in this culture. The questions and the responses of the two sons are presumed to be known by the whole community. The son who said he would go and work in the vineyard honored his father, while his brother's response was an embarrassment to his father. Neither son has responded in a way that would bring joy to the father.

But Jesus has asked the chief priests and the elders which son actually did what the father asked of him. Their answer embarrasses themselves, implying that they are like the first son, who in appearance says the right thing, but whose actions are lacking. In fact, their maintaining a virtuous appearance has prevented them from responding with care and compassion to many of the very people with whom Jesus commonly associates, the tax collectors and the prostitutes. These, who appeared less virtuous, went out and were baptized by John and changed their lives, while the chief priests and elders did not recognize his baptism.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever felt the need to say the right things in order to maintain appearances or respect the authority of another?
2. Can you also recall an occasion when you chose to speak the reality of a situation as you understood it, even if it was unsettling to those in authority?
3. How do you respond to those in your community and church, in civil and social settings, who challenge your perspective?
4. Do you know people who are unwilling to be challenged with alternative perspectives? Do you also know people who seem to invite and welcome perspectives that are not their own?
5. As years pass, are you finding yourself more tolerant of flaws in those around you?
6. Are you becoming more aware of your own need for conversion?
7. What is it like for you to go to confession?
8. What does the fact that the Church makes the sacrament of reconciliation available without limit say to you about the Church's understanding of the human condition, and her understanding of the desire of God?
9. Can you take some time to talk with God about the places in your life where you find it a challenge to have your words match your actions?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are prepared and distributed by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel, as edited from Reflections authored by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for September 27, 2026, the Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thus says the Lord: You say, "The Lord's way is not fair!"

Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?

When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies,
it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die.

But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, he does what is right and just,
he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins
that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

Remember your mercies, O Lord. Your ways, O Lord, make known to me;

teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.

Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from of old.

The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not; in your kindness remember me,

because of your goodness, O Lord. Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way.

He guides the humble to justice, and teaches the humble his way.

Brothers and sisters: If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing.

Do nothing out of selfishness; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.

Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus,

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness;

and found human in appearance, he humbled himself,

becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name

which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons.

He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.'

He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards changed his mind and went.

The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go.

Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first."

Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes

are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness,

you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did.

Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."

Excerpts from Ezekiel 18:25-28; Psalm 25:4-9; Philippians 2:1-11; and Matthew 21:28-32

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for September 27th, as authored by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from Matthew, Jesus asks the chief priests and elders their opinion about a situation. A man asks his two sons to "go out and work in the vineyard today." The first replies, "I will not," but then he does it. The second replies, "Yes, sir," but he does not go. When Jesus asks, "Which of the two did his father's will," they answer, "The first." Jesus tells them, "Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. They believed John when he came. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."

The other readings also have direct references to what is the Lord's way, and the result of turning to it. In the first reading from Ezekiel, the Lord says, "Is it my way that is unfair, or are your ways unfair? When someone virtuous turns away from virtue, because of the iniquity he must die. But if he turns from wickedness and does what is right, he shall not die." Psalm 25 implores, "Make your ways known to me, O Lord; guide me in your truth and teach me your paths. Remember your compassion, O Lord, not the sins of my youth." In the second reading, Paul writes to the Philippians, "Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, and look out for their interests. Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus, who, though in the form of God, emptied himself, even to death. Because of this, God greatly exalted him."

In both the Old Testament (Ezekiel, and Psalm 25) and the New (Philippians), it comes down to the question that Jesus asks in the Gospel, "Which did his father's will?" "He shall preserve our life," whoever of us did His will in the end, in spite of what we did at first. "The Lord shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice." "Found human in appearance, humble yourself; become obedient... Complete his joy by being of the same mind, with the same love." The Lord says in Ezekiel, "Since he has turned away from all the sins that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!