

## October 01 XXVI Sunday in Ordinary Time

What will decide our eternal reward or punishment? Our final decision for or against God-- our choosing to obey Him gracefully by doing His will or our choosing to go against His will! Gifted with free will, we are the ones who choose our eternal destiny.

In the first reading, Ezekiel, corrects two incorrect Jewish beliefs i) Children inherit the guilt of their ancestors and are punished for their sins. ii) God is more strict than merciful. Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps. 25) appeals to God's compassion and mercy, begging Him to wipe away our sins and to extend mercy to us. The second reading: Our final choice for God, made by perfect obedience to Him, will be rewarded. It is because of Christ's perfect obedience to God's will in "emptying himself, taking human form" and humbling himself by accepting "even death, death on a cross," that God the Father "exalted Christ, bestowed on him the Name above every other name".

In today's Gospel parable, a man with two sons tells both to go out to work in the vineyard. The first son says he will not go, but later he regrets his refusal and goes to work. He represents tax collectors and public sinners who refused to obey God's commandments, but, after listening to John the Baptist and Jesus, repented and became eligible for eternal reward. The second son says that he will go but does not. He represents the chief priests and the elders, the Scribes, and the Pharisees. By their pride, and their refusal to obey God's call to repentance through John the Baptist and Jesus, these so called "religious" people excluded themselves from eternal reward. We need to offer a continual "yes" to the saving act of God. Even when we say no, God gives us many chances of conversion, repentance, and doing His will.

Who are these two sons at present? The first son: 1) A repentant alcoholic, drug addict, chronic gambler sexual-deviant. 2) Members of a poor village parish who reach out to the needy in the community. 3) A Church member who decides to tithe or a young person who decides to remain abstinent until marriage. All these choose to obey Christ sacrificially.

The second son 1) A regular church goer who refuses Christ, entry into his or her heart and life and lives a pagan life on weekdays. 2) A Christian who refuses to obey Christ in the sensitive areas of sex, money, and power. 3) A Church that

ignores issues of justice and mercy. 5) A Sunday School that neglects to teach children the great Biblical stories -- in short, all people who appear to be faithful but, deep down in their hearts, are not.

(1) We each need to lead a responsible Christian life, saying “yes” to God. Each one of us is responsible to God for every one of our actions, and the just God will punish or reward each of us according to our actions. As we do not know at what moment death will take us, our only guarantee of dying in God's friendship is to live in that friendship always, saying “Yes” to God in our deeds. We should become men and women who profess our Faith in word and deed, remembering that, "Not all those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but those who do the will of my Father Who is in Heaven" (Mt 7:21). God is ever with us to strengthen us, to pardon us, and to lift us up again when, through human weakness, we stumble on the road. God is calling us right now, inviting us to work in His vineyard, inviting us to say “Yes” to Him with our words and actions. Let us accept God’s invitation by purifying our hearts in the Sacrament of Reconciliation; by resolving to act upon our promises each morning before we get out of bed; and by declaring interiorly that people will be able to identify us as followers of Christ, not by empty words or pious gestures but simply by our Christian actions. In this way, we shall live a life filled with the joy that doing the will of the Father brings.

2) Instead of trusting in lame excuses, we need to seek God’s mercy. We often use flimsy excuses to silence our conscience. They run like this: “I didn't realize how sinful I was”; “I was just too busy with work, family, and a decent social life to have time for Sunday Mass”; “That’s what all my family does – it’s got to be OK!” ; “The devil made me do it – it wasn’t my fault!”; “I couldn’t be different from everyone else—I’d look stupid!”; “I meant to straighten things out – I just didn’t get to it.” These are not valid excuses at the judgment seat of God. Hence, if we have been disobedient to God in our past life, we need to knock at the door of God’s mercy now. We need to remember that what God in his mercy did for the tax-collectors and harlots in the parable, the Matthews, the Augustines, the Margarets of Cortona, and the millions of unknown penitents who are now Saints in Heaven, He can, and will, do for us, if we repent of our past sins and renew our lives as the first-asked son in the parable did. It is never too late for us to be transformed.