

Read

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Philippians 2:1-11 or 2:1-5

Matthew 21:28-32

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 1, 2023



REFLECTION

Today's readings are all about humility and authenticity. The message we hear is about being our truest self and not simply doing things in order to appear good. For example, have you ever gone to Mass or to reconciliation because you felt like it was what you were supposed to do but your spirit wasn't really in it? Jesus teaches that it is important to discern who you are and what values you want to embrace in your life so that when you attend church, go to reconciliation, finish homework, or speak kindly to elders, you are doing these things because you understand the value behind the actions. Without contemplation our actions might be empty or without meaning. Our Christian life is a continuous journey, in which we are always drawing closer to God and becoming a more authentic disciple and witness of God's love.



ACTION

This week, take some time to reflect on who you are and whether your actions reflect your identity. First, decide what values you want to embrace in life. In other words, what character values do you hope are a part of your identity ten years from now? Then underneath each characteristic make a few notes of how you might achieve and maintain that goal within the activities you already do. Maybe there are things you will need to stop doing so that your actions better match these values. Finally, start living these values out! Put them into practice in your daily life.



Watch *The Pursuit of Happyness* for a great example of sticking to your values and being persistent despite setbacks.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How does the saying "actions speak louder than words" apply to this Gospel and to your life?
- ❖ How can your actions and participation in church help shape those around you?



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TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #136A

Ezekiel 18:25-28

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Philippians 2:1-11 or 2:1-5

Matthew 21:28-32

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In today's Gospel we get to see Jesus talking with the chief priests and the elders of the community. He gently challenges them to think more deeply about their faith. After posing the question about which son did the father's will, the one who agreed but didn't follow through or the one who declined but later changed his mind, Jesus gives them time to respond. They report the correct answer, but Jesus points out that it isn't how they have been living their lives. Jesus calls all of us to an authentic relationship with the Father in today's reading and to authentically live as his disciples.

Q FOCUS: *Following the Father's will is better late and honest rather than fake and not at all.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

The Church celebrates St. Francis of Assisi on October 4. Francis was born in 1182 and grew up in a wealthy family. Instead of following in the expected path of his family, Francis' whole life changed after his conversion to the faith. He felt God's call to renounce all his worldly wealth and live simply, building up God's Church on earth. He lived a life of prayer and shared the Good News. He gained followers of this simple way of life and founded the Franciscan order. He also emphasized the goodness

of God's creation. He is the patron saint of Italy, ecology, animals, and merchants. Many churches celebrate a blessing of animals on his feast day.

Church Teaching Connection

"Obedience does not consist of saying 'yes' or 'no', but always in taking action, in cultivating the vineyard, in bringing about the Kingdom of God, in doing good. With this simple example, Jesus wants to go beyond a religion understood only as external and habitual practice, which does not affect people's lives and attitudes, a superficial religiosity" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, September 27, 2020).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 21:28-32

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

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."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

► **Can you describe a situation in which you have been let down by someone or when someone did not keep their word? How did that make you feel?**

When someone doesn't follow through on what they said they would do, it can affect other people. In sports, music, or theatre, if we do not carry out the commitment to practice, we will not perform well during the event and might let our group down. In school, if you don't do your part on a group assignment, you leave the others in the group scrambling to finish. These examples are not that different from our Gospel passage today and could be used in a modern retelling of this parable.

The simple message of the parable Jesus presents in the Gospel passage today about our actions reflecting our true beliefs is a challenge directed at the elders and the chief priests. These groups of people are learned in the law and in the faith. They are supposed to be the ones who know the right answer and the ones to whom others look as an example of a holy person. Jesus knows, however, that they may say the right thing, but they do not always live that same way. So he asks them the question about which son did the father's will. They answer that the one who ultimately did the work did the father's will. They know the right answer in theory but living that out is another story. In contrast, those

people who are usually looked down upon (like tax collectors and prostitutes) have chosen to repent of their sins and believe, acting out the faith that they now profess.

► **What are some things that young people your age might do that are on trend, but do not really reflect the Christian faith?**

Jesus is essentially calling the elders and the chief priests hypocrites. We might think about the saying "actions speak louder than words" in this situation and in the situations young people today might find themselves in. When our faith is not deeply rooted in our hearts, our actions don't always reflect what we profess to believe. We need to have a stable foundation of faith so that when we are confronted with different situations, we can act as Christ would.

We aren't perfect, so there will be times when we choose the wrong path. But today's Gospel gives us hope. Jesus' words at the end, noting that the elders didn't change their ways even after a second witness of the faith, reminds us that *we* still have time to change our ways. God is always giving us opportunities to come closer to himself and follow him. Even when we mess up, we can go to the sacrament of reconciliation and be strengthened to return to God and change our ways.

Even though God keeps giving us these opportunities to change, it is important not to put it off. The time to live a life that obeys the Father's will is now. It is not later when you graduate, when you have a career, or when you are close to death. We don't know when we will be called to heaven, so we should make the most of every opportunity to follow the path of Jesus. Our Christian witness in our words and actions can inspire others to do the same!

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 38.

It is never too late to follow the Father's will.

Actions speak louder than words.

How authentic is your faith life?

Act on the Word

Are You Who You Say You Are?

For this activity, you will need sticky notes, pens or markers, and access to the song "Just as I Am" by Matt Maher.

Invite the teens to think of some specific words that define them. This is not about things they do or roles they play. Instead, ask them to think of positive words that describe how they act. You can suggest words such as kind, forgiving, funny, athletic, loud, shy, timid, outgoing, introverted, helpful, sweet, adventurous, affectionate, compassionate, courageous, and friendly to help get them started. As they think of three to four words that describe them, play the song, "Just as I Am," by Matt Maher. After they listen to the song and think of the words that describe them, give each teen a sticky note and a pen. Have them write just the words they thought of on the sticky note. Do not have them put their names on the note. Collect the notes and put them on the wall in no particular order. See if the young people can identify who belongs to each sticky note. This may be difficult but not impossible.

After they try to guess who belongs to each sticky note, guide them in a brief discussion. Point out that there is a lyric in the song that says "Just as I am, Jesus you welcomed me." Note that we don't have to pretend to be someone we are not in this life. Jesus calls us to be who we are, to be our authentic

selves. Encourage the teens to think about the parts of themselves that they didn't put on the sticky notes, the parts we don't want others to see. Remind them that we all have times when we are angry, impatient, thoughtless, unfair, rude, impolite, and more. But, the love of Jesus never wavers. Encourage them to focus on the positive qualities that they wrote on the sticky notes and how they can use these qualities to help them do the Father's will throughout their lives.

Closing Prayer

*Gracious Lord,
you offer us the way to your kingdom.
Open us to your guidance
so that others might see in us
a reflection of your truth and goodness.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.