

**First Reading:** Ezekiel 18:25-28 (*You will save your life if you turn from doing evil*)

**Responsorial Psalm 25:** "Remember your mercies, O Lord."

**Second Reading:** Philippians 2:1-11 (*Have the same attitude that is in Christ Jesus*)

**Gospel:** Matthew 21:28-32 (*He changed his mind and did what his father said.*

*Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of heaven before you)*

♪♪ We remember how you loved us to your death,  
And still we celebrate, for you are with us here.  
And we believe that we will see you when you come, in your glory, Lord.  
WE REMEMBER, WE CELEBRATE, WE BELIEVE! ♪♪

That song is a description of why we worship on Sunday. We come together to remember the gift of God's love and the call to share it. We celebrate that love and nourish our faith in God, in Christ and in the Spirit who empowers us to share that love and truth.

In the Gospel passage today, we are called to remember how Jesus always gives us another chance. Francis of Assisi - whose feast is next Saturday, October 4<sup>th</sup> - began his life going from one wild party to the next. Then he tried to be a knight and conquer the enemies of Assisi. He got bored with the parties and got captured early in his first battle. After getting out of prison, he heard the call to rebuild the Lord's house, so he stole some material from his father's shop and sold it to buy stones. He tried to follow God's call several times before he got it right. He thought it was about fixing church buildings, but he finally realized it was about the *living* stones of the Body of Christ - building up the people who are the Church. He was like the first son in the Gospel. He said he was not going to live according to God's will, then he changed his mind.

The Good News that the Word of God gives me is that I can still follow him, even when I do not get it right the first time - or the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>. As the reading from Ezekiel says, if someone turns from evil to do good, he or she shall surely live, they shall not die.

But I am too often like the second son who says I *will* do it, then does not. The second son talked a good game, but did not really have faith. He did not embarrass his father by open rebellion, but he did not do what his father asked him to do. I see his spirit at work when bureaucrats, politicians and corporate executives make promises they don't keep and spin the situation for their own advantage. They are all talk and little effective action - All puff and no stuff. And, closer to home, I can forget what I promise to do, or promise more than I can give. I can be so certain that I am right that I forget about the people who will be hurt by my choices.

Jesus did not ask which son did not embarrass his father, or which one behaved more honorably, he asked which one *did* the will of the father.

I remember what one of my teachers used to say, "*It is more important to love than to be right.*" It is more important to discern and follow the will of God than to keep insisting that my way is the only way.

While on vacation, I visited a place in Westport, NY near Lake Champlain called *Crooked Brook Studios*. The artist who lives there creates outdoor sculptures from old farm equipment and implements that he has discovered rusting in fields or barns. The one that most fascinates me is called: "*The Angel of Inerrancy, conveying well meaning souls to hell.*"

As I looked at it, and meditated on its shape and the words that described it, I saw an image of the second son - the one who told his father that he would do what he wanted, and then did something else.

I thought of the terrible stories and images of Isis and its leader - a man who does not put the principles of his religion or the will of Allah into practice, even while he claims to be the only true Muslim. He is someone who is not doing God's work, he is taking God's place. His followers are hungry for certainty, and are following what my artist friend calls the angel of inerrancy, and are clearly doing things that stink of hell. I was surprised and grateful to hear the Muslim ruler of Jordan speak out on 60 minutes. He expressed his anger about how this group is betraying the true meaning of his religion. He and many other Muslims are saying that Isis does not act in the name of their religion, or in the name of the true God.



I believe that the same thing can happen even among Christians. There are men and women who call themselves Christian and claim to do the will of their Lord, but do not practice what Jesus preaches. They are often very certain that they are right, but they are not living the Gospel of Christ when they persecute gay & lesbian persons, or when they ignore the needs of the poor and reject immigrants who are exiles from their own land, while conveniently forgetting that most Americans - including me & my family - can trace their ancestry to people who were immigrants themselves, sometimes for reasons of persecution or poverty. My grandparents came to this country from Lithuania and Italy. Where did yours come from?

We can fight movements like Isis, influence the leaders we have elected to care for the common good, and avoid the hypocrisy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> son by practicing what Jesus preaches and always being ready to seek *God's* will, even when it means we have to change our minds and attitudes.

We often say to each other, and to ourselves: "*Practice what you preach!*" I don't think that is enough. I need to be ready to let the Spirit of God correct and even change what I preach so it is in harmony with truth and love. We are called by God to practice what *Jesus* preaches. And what does Jesus preach?

It can be found at every Mass. During the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, we hear the words: "Do this in memory of me" - That is what is called "*anamnesis*" in Greek. It means much more than to remember something in the past. It is more like "*To recall a past event and to make it effective in the present.*" In the song this is reflected not only in the words, "*We remember*" - but also "*You are with us here.*"

When we hear those words at Mass, they do not just mean to celebrate Mass one more time. They are a call to practice what Jesus preaches:

**Love one another as I have loved you, Do THIS in memory of me!**

**Forgive as you have been forgiven, Do THIS in memory of me!**

**Take on my mind & attitude, as St. Paul writes today, Do THIS in memory of me!**

*Eucharist* is a verb - *Church* is a verb. It is what happens when we gather to pray and reach out in love and care for each other and the poor. When we sing "*We will see you*" it's not only in some future time, but when we meet Jesus in each other, in those in need and even in the mirror.

At the end of the Mass we are dismissed with words that are difficult to translate. The Latin words are "*Ite missa est.*" They mean much more than "This ritual is over, it's time to go." They are the words that give the name "*Mass*" to what we do today. The current English translation of these words given for the dismissal at the end of Mass gives two choices that are closer to the original meaning:

*"Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life," and "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord."*

They both express the truth that we are being sent (*Missio*). We are sent on a *mission* by each Eucharist. A mission impossible, in a way, since only with the *Grace of God* and the presence of Christ within us can we even conceive of doing what God asks us to do. We are sent to be women and men who have the attitude of Christ, as described in the beautiful words of the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading.

*"Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at.  
Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in our likeness.*

*He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!*

*Because of this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name.*

*So that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth,  
and under the earth,  
and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!*  
(Philippians 2:6-11 New American Bible)

We are sent to *do* the will of the Father. To make the kingdom of justice, love and peace more real in our own time and place. We are sent to love one another, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to be ministers of reconciliation and healing. We are sent on mission to extend the Eucharist we celebrate today to the whole week by our prayer, our love and our commitment to life and peace in our families, in our schools and in our careers. We are sent to glorify the Lord with our lives.

We are sent to do this in memory of Jesus.

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And still we celebrate, for you are with us here.  
And we believe that we will see you when you come, in your glory, Lord.  
WE REMEMBER, WE CELEBRATE, WE BELIEVE! ♪♪