

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Changes in our thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs are often preceded by taking some form of action. It can be very difficult to think our way into right behaviors, yet when we take action despite not wanting to do something, we often find our thoughts and attitudes beginning to align with Jesus. Like last week, this Sunday's Gospel Reading is set in a vineyard as Jesus shares a parable of two brothers asked to tend to their father's land:

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?"

Father Jim Harbaugh, S.J., a recovering alcoholic, reflects upon this Gospel Reading. "The first son in this story sounds like an alcoholic; in fact, I think he sounds like me," Harbaugh writes. "When the father orders him to go to the vineyard, this son says, 'What an order! I can't go through with it.' He blows up and stomps off, and broods a while, and then eventually (probably after he has decided it's really his idea to go), he goes. The other brother, much like the Elder Brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, is a bright-eyed and bushy-tailed Eddie Haskell type, so of course he says yes right away. Unlike the "alcoholic brother," he doesn't tie himself into knots of guilt and defiance brooding over the father's command. Why should he? He's the respectable son. And since he doesn't think twice about his father's command, it slips his mind."

Good intentions are nice, but our actions and behaviors ultimately form who we are. In recovery from lust addiction and sexual compulsions, we are asked to take on an attitude that seeks the well-being of others and trusts God's divine plan. Extending a helping hand to another is an action, not an intention.

Ultimately, God's incredible patience must not be overlooked. His generosity toward us leads the way for us to be generous, merciful, and loving to others in return. There may be times when we need an attitude adjustment, and we can look to Jesus as our ideal per the guidance of Saint Paul in this Sunday's Second Reading:

*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 or out of vainglory;
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.*

Working the Twelve Steps helps create a new attitude within us through faith and apostolic action. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you can't see the whole staircase."

Jesus was most like God in his willingness to share fellowship with the most irritable of humanity—even with those who tell God off and later come back to Him sheepishly. Let us adopt the same willingness to align our actions with God's will and maintain a grateful attitude.

Reflection Questions

- What types of actions and behaviors help you develop healthy thoughts and attitudes?
- Describe a time when you took some spiritual action despite not wanting to in the moment. What were the results? How did you encounter Jesus in the process?
- How are you finding encouragement in Christ today?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28

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

Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32