

FINE WORDS AND GOOD DEEDS

26TH Sunday Ordinary Time

Year A

Eze 18:25-28; Ps 25:4-9; Phi 2:1-11; Matt 21:28-32

by Dcn. Tom McConnell

An associate pastor, new to the parish, saw the need to start an adult Bible-study group where parishioners could learn to read the Word of God and deepen their faith. After service one morning, he presented the idea to the parish and received a unanimous and enthusiastic feedback. "It is a wonderful idea!", they all said. Then the young associate told his pastor that the parishioners were happy with the idea of starting an adult Bible class. The older and more experienced pastor told the associate to rephrase the question and consult the parishioners again. So, the following day the young priest asked the same congregation, "Who would like to sign up for the new adult Bible-study group? Only four hands went up. Then it dawned on the young man that saying "yes" to an idea is one thing, but doing what is required, is quite another.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of two sons who say one thing and do another. Asked by the father to go and work in the vineyard, the first son said "no", but later reconsidered his decision and did the work. The second son, on the other hand, courteously said "yes" to the father, but failed to do the work. Who actually did

what his father wanted? Clearly it was the first son, the same one who had said “no” to him.

Jesus told this parable in the temple in Jerusalem just days before they would arrest him and put him to death. For three years he had been preaching to the people, inviting them to repent and believe the Good News. He had discovered that, in fact, it was public sinners, like the tax-collectors and prostitutes, who responded positively to his invitation. The religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, even after they perceived the divine origin of the message of Jesus, still opposed it rather than believing it. They had greeted John the Baptist with the same attitude. They knew John's teaching was from God, but they would not admit it. As Jesus said to them, "even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him" (Matthew 21:32). Religious people are sometimes so bent on proving that they are right, that they fail to hear the voice of reason, and the voice of God.

The parable likens the tax-collectors and prostitutes to the son who first said “no”, but later did what the father wanted; and the

Pharisees and scribes, to the son who enthusiastically said “yes”, but did not go. One group has no fine words, but they have good deeds...The other group has fine words, but no corresponding good deeds.

These groups represent two kinds of people and the different ways they try to relate to God. There are those of us who have no fine words...who profess no faith...who do not go to church...who do not pray. But sometimes when there is injustice, they will be the first to rise up and condemn it. When there are people out in the cold, they will be the first to donate a blanket. Wherever there is famine or earthquake, they will deny themselves to contribute to help the victims. These people have no fine words to say to God or about God, but when they do things such as these, they are doing what God has commanded us all to do.

Then there are those of us who have all the fine words...who come to church every Sunday and say to God: "Amen! We believe." We wear badges and medals as ways of professing our faith. But sometimes when it comes to concrete action in support of what we

know to be the will of God, we are found wanting. If we carry on like this, then we should heed the warning that those other folks, with no fine words, are going into the kingdom of God ahead of us.

To conclude, we need to point out that today's parable is really the parable of two bad sons. Which of the two boys would you have as an ideal son: the one who bluntly says “no” to his father's face, or the one who says “yes” but does not follow up on it? The answer is: none of the above. Ideal sons and daughters are those who say “yes” to their parents and then go on to do what is commanded of them. Ideal followers of Christ are those who have fine words and good deeds. This is what we all should aim to be -- men and women who profess our faith in word and deed - knowing 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" (Matthew 7:21)....

May this message challenge you...and may God richly bless you!