

**Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
(Sept. 25, 2005)**

Can No Mean Yes?

As always our readings are challenging. What's going on in that Gospel and how might it affect us in our lives today?

First of all we have to understand that Jesus is addressing the religious leaders of the people, the Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests, whom he always seems to be engaging in controversy. They have just asked him by what authority he does the things he does. Instead of directly answering he tells them this homely parable. A farmer had two sons. He asks one to go into the fields to work. The son says, Yes, he will, but then he does not go. He tells a second son the same thing. The second son says no, then later changes his mind and does go into the field.

Now Jesus, as we know, spent a great deal of time with sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, and the like, people who apparently said no to God by their sinful ways, but when Jesus came along, they repented and followed him. The religious leaders on the other hand, who said they always did the right thing, did not accept Jesus. Equivalently they said Yes to God but did not do what God wanted. That's the message that Jesus wanted to get across. His coming into our world presented a challenge to the people of his time. He was now the ultimate, the definitive revelation of God and of what God asks of us. His presence in the lives of his own people, just as his presence in our lives, demands a response. We have to do something. We cannot simply say yes or no. It must be followed by action – and maybe that action first requires what was necessary in the lives of those sinners, prostitutes, and tax collectors that Jesus befriended and that is: conversion, a change of mind and a change of heart.

Now I think there is an interesting connection between this Gospel passage and the second reading we heard from Paul's letter to his dear friends, the Philippians. Paul's letters are sometimes addressed to communities that are having problems – and that's the case with this one.

There were divisions in the community, factions, and petty jealousies that were preventing them from having the kind of unity and community

that Jesus had asked of them. So Paul exhorts:

“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being of full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

And he tells them effectively that the only way to do this is by having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. In other words he is calling for conversion – conversion from selfishness and self-centeredness to openness and concern for others as Jesus did when he did not cling to his divine position with the Father but condescended to become a human being like us to show us the Father’s love and his own as well. Paul says he emptied himself out, taking the form of a slave, a servant to all of us. And Paul says if we could only imitate this attitude divisions would disappear and we could live together once again in the peace and harmony that God intended from the beginning, but which was disrupted by sin. Powerful words on Paul’s part, yet they are the Christian answer to the troubles of the world we live in.

We must learn, he says, to be like the son who at first perhaps said no to his father, but later repented, emptying himself, changing his mind and his heart, to do what his father asked him to do

If we could only realize, really realize that basically we are all brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the one good God who loves us very much, it would be much more difficult to let people starve or go homeless. We might all learn to live in peace, recognizing the solidarity that binds us all as one huge family.

Wouldn’t that be wonderful? Well, you know, it all begins with individual people, saying Yes to God and meaning it. It all begins with that conversion that allows us to put on the mind of Christ Jesus. That’s one of the reasons we come here, to gain the strength that our Eucharistic celebration can give so that we can leave here and be instruments in the hand of God to make our city, our nation, our world a better place to live in.

Let’s pray about that and beg God’s blessing upon all our efforts.