**Readings for October 1, 2023 – 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Saying Yes – For Real

*God is always inviting us to “change our minds,” so that that we can follow God’s will in a real and genuine way. Conversion of our hearts and minds comes through prayer, which helps us to realize that God’s ways are far above ours.*

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**Opening Prayer:** Lord, if I build a stronger relationship with you, I know I will want to freely respond to you, and to do your will with enthusiasm. Transform my lukewarm response, and give me a deeper faith. Help me to know my need for you, so that I will willingly turn to you, with a strong and heartfelt “yes.”

**Reading 1** [**EZ 18:25-28**](http://usccb.org/bible/ezekiel/18%3A25)

Thus says the LORD: You say, "The LORD's way is not fair!" Hear now, house of Israel:
Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?
When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies,
it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die.
But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed,
he does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life;
since he has turned away from all the sins that he has committed,
he shall surely live, he shall not die.

**Responsorial Psalm** [**PS 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14**](http://usccb.org/bible/psalms/25%3A4)

R. (6a) **Remember your mercies, O Lord.**
Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior.
R. **Remember your mercies, O Lord.**
Remember that your compassion, O LORD, and your love are from of old.
The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not;
in your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O LORD.
R. **Remember your mercies, O Lord.**
Good and upright is the LORD; thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice, and teaches the humble his way.
R. **Remember your mercies, O Lord.**

**Reading 2**[**PHIL 2:1-11 OR 2:1-5**](http://usccb.org/bible/philippians/2%3A1)

Brothers and sisters: 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.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name
which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Gospel** [**MT 21:28-32**](http://usccb.org/bible/matthew/21%3A28)

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."

Related Reflections

*From Fr. John Foley, SJ*

God at times appeals to our self-interest in order to get us to do what is right. In other words he uses our self-interest to reach beyond our self-interest, so to speak. We are shown this in the first reading, where we find a straight-out argument between the people and God. The people claim that “The Lord’s way is not fair!”

Earlier they had quoted the famous saying, “The parents eat sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge” ([Ez 18:2](http://www.usccb.org/bible/ezekiel/18%3A2%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)). Apparently they are arguing that sin should be attributed to their fathers or mothers, but not to them. Therefore God is punishing them unjustly.

God replies: Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, *are not your ways unfair*?

He shows them that punishment comes to those who actually commit an iniquity, not to those who just happen to be born of the parents of the iniquity. “It is your own actions that matter. If you sin, it is fair that I punish you. If you do virtue, it is fair that I give you life.”

Jesus takes it one step further in the [Gospel](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/100117.cfm). We hear a parable about a man being asked by his father to go work in the vineyard. The man says, rudely, “I will not.” Surely he would be counted as one of the sinful people described above. Or maybe he just had a headache, or was not a morning person, or whatever. But when his father leaves the house, this one changes his mind and goes out to work hard on the grape vines.

He has a brother. The brother says in effect, “Yes, of course I will go out and do your will!” Isn't this exactly what God had been telling the people in the First Reading? I am sure the father in this parable was pleased, especially after the rude reply he had gotten from his other son. Of course, as we know, this brother too changed his mind. He did not bother to go at all.

This second brother’s selfish interests were served by saying “yes, yes” to his father. It made him look good. But he did not trouble himself to actually do what he promised. Self-interest did not get him to do good, but only to seem to do good.

St. Paul says to look at what Christ did ([Second Reading](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/100117.cfm)) if we want true motivation, as well as encouragement, solace, participation in the Spirit, compassion, and mercy. Then we will not act out of selfishness, but will serve others humbly, as he did. This is the ultimate motivation in Christianity.

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. Because of this God greatly exalted him.

Self-interested motives are not the only ones. Let us just look at Christ—when we are at prayer and at Mass—and let him form us in humility. Let God make us good. - Published on liturgy.slu.edu

**What is authentic faith?**

One of my favorite children’s books is *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams, about a stuffed rabbit who longs to become real. The best lines in the whole book are spoken in the nursery, between the little rabbit and a toy horse: “What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day….“Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?” “Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse.

“It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become REAL.”

I guess I like that so much because I think it speaks to a problem many Christians have today—a lack of realness, or authenticity. Many of us may have an outward appearance that impresses, like the toys with “stick-out handles.” Or we may have “things that buzz inside,” i.e., gifts and talents that make us special. But when it comes down to it, how many of us are real?

I get almost physically ill when I read some Christian books, or hear certain speakers talk about the Christian life. Even meeting with other Christians can sometimes feel like a gathering of spiritual Kens and Barbies—cookie cutter Christians who are there to talk about how they’ve arrived. This behavior probably affects me so because I see it in myself. It’s tempting to pretend you’re super-spiritual, that you have all of the answers. And so much scarier to admit you don’t.

How do we become real? It’s not something we can accomplish. The rabbit had to have his fur loved off, and I believe that’s the way it happens. We have to accept that Jesus loves us—really, loves us. None of us has all of the answers. No one has arrived. But He loves us anyway. And that frees us to be real—and to really love others. *Ask Jesus to help you grow in a faith that is authentic, that His character may increase in your life.*

* By Gwen Ford Faulkenberry (published on Guideposts.org)

**From Fr. Ron Rolheiser:**

We are all familiar with a refrain that echoes through many of our Christian prayers and songs, an antiphon of hope addressed to God:  Grant that we may be one with all the saints in singing your praises! But what would it mean to be among the saints singing God’s praises?

We are one with the saints in singing God’s praises when we are one with them in the way we live our lives; when, like them, our lives are transparent, honest, grounded in personal integrity, with no skeletons in our closet. Being one with the saints in singing God’s praises is less about singing songs in our churches than it is about living honest lives outside of them.

We are one with the saints in singing God’s praises when we radiate God’s wide compassion; when we, like God, let our love embrace beyond race, creed, gender, religion, ideology, and differences of every kind. We are one with the saints in praising God when our heart, like God’s heart, is a house with many rooms. Being one with the saints in singing God’s praises means being compassionate as God is compassionate, it means letting our sun shine on the bad as well as the good and letting our empathy embrace too those whose ideas oppose us.

We are one with the saints in singing God’s praises when we live in a healthy self-effacement, when we dethrone ourselves as the center of the universe. We are one with the saints in singing God’s praises when we live in hope, when we ground our vision and our energies in the promise of God and in the power that God revealed in the resurrection of Jesus. We are one with the saints in singing God’s praises when, like Julian of Norwich, we live in the belief that, irrespective of any present darkness, in the end all will be well and every manner of being will be well.

We are one with the saints in singing God’s praises only when we live our lives as they lived theirs.

 - Published on liturgy.slu.edu

This parable, Jesus says, is about entering the kingdom of heaven. In the parable, a father says to one of his sons, “Go to work in my vineyard, Son!”; and that son says, “NO!” Then the father says to his other son, “Go to work in my vineyard, Son!” And that son says, “YES!”

Which of these sons is the good son? Which one enters the kingdom of heaven? You might sensibly enough think that it is the son who says “YES” to his father. After all, what could be worse than saying “NO!” to God the father? Who would think that rebellious *NO-*sayers could be pleasing to God? Who would suppose that they could enter the kingdom of heaven?

And so it seems clear that the *YES*-sayers are the ones who will enter the kingdom of heaven and those wretched NO-sayers will wind up in the other place. But this is not what Jesus says. He says that the *NO-*saying son is the one who did the will of his father. He is the one who entered the kingdom of heaven, and not the YES-saying son. Why would Jesus say this?

Well, the son who says “YES” to his father doesn’t actually do what his father wants him to do. It is the NO-saying son who actually goes to work in his father’s vineyard. And so here is the thing for us to notice. What the *NO*-saying son *says*is contrary to God’s will. But what he *does*is in accordance with it.

It is just the other way around with the *YES*-saying son. The words of the *YES*-saying son are obedient to God’s will, but his life is lived in opposition to it. The words of the *YES-*saying son are empty. His life, not his words, tell the real truth about his relationship to his father. The truth is that the YES-saying son rejects God’s will, however much acceptance there is in his words.

And so the [Psalm](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/100117.cfm) gives us the right prayer to go with this parable: “Lord, teach us your ways!” Our ways need to be God’s ways. It is good if our words say YES to God. But what is crucial is that our lives say *YES*to God. Unless they do, our words are worthless.

From Eleanor Stump: Center for Luturgy Study, St. Louis University (Published on liturgy.slu.edu)

Related scripture:

**Romans 12: 9-12 --** Let your love be sincere.

**1 John 3: 18 -24 –** Our love is not to be mere talk.

**Psalm 138** – I will give you thanks with my whole heart.

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Discussion Questions:

What do you think this parable from Jesus shows us about who Jesus (and God) is? Do you think Jesus understands our human faults and limitations? Why?

Why do you think God gives us the space to “change our minds” and come closer to God if we find we are not quite there? How does that make you feel?

How does the concept of free will fit in here?

Think about what’s fair in life, and what’s not. Whose standards do we usually use to judge this? How might God’s criteria be different? (Does the second reading give us any clues about what’s most important to God?)

What could help me turn my lukewarm response to God toward a more full-hearted, genuine yes?

**Closing Prayer**

Fair and just are your ways, God and master of the vineyard. Help us to grow our steadfast bond with you, and let us gladly love your world and work side by side in the vineyard where we are planted. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

***Also:***

Dear Lord, I will labor with you to bring God’s reign, if you will give me the gift to do it. Amen.

Joseph Tetlow, S.J. - *From the Meditation on Christ the King; part of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*

***Repeating our weekly focus prayer (adapted from St. Anselm):***

Oh Lord, teach us to love those who hate us, and pray for those who do us wrong. May we be the children of your love. Amen.

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***Thoughts for the Coming Week:***

How does God see me? Who am I before God?

Is my faith sincere? Do I do what I profess to do? Is my response to God sometimes lukewarm?

What are some signs in the world that God’s love for me is steadfast and unchanging?