

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A September 28, 2008

Readings: Ezekiel 18:25-28; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32

Yes, Boss

I had a boss once who always came up with some crazy ideas and suggestions for us to work on. At first I would protest and try to show him why his ideas were a waste of time. But when I went in for my first performance appraisal, I was chastised; he said I had a bad attitude. So I learned to just smile and keep my mouth shut. I could usually ignore the things he wanted me to do because he was always coming up with something new, and forgot about the old things before we could ever accomplish them. The easiest thing was to say yes to his assignments, but then go do what I knew was the right thing. I have to confess, I acted a lot like the second son in our gospel; I said yes to please my boss, but then didn't do his will.

And Jesus tells us that words without action do not accomplish God's will when we go out into the vineyard. We need to labor and toil for souls, not just talk about it. It's easy to talk about the hard work of winning souls for Christ, but it is much more challenging to actually do it. It's hard to follow God's will. Jesus tells the chief priests and elders that they make the appearance of following God's will, but that the tax collectors and prostitutes are the ones who heard the message of John the Baptist and responded to it. They are the ones who truly heard the call to conversion.

I'm sure many of you have been in a club or organization, a parish council, or maybe a group at work, where there is always one person that has a lot of suggestions and makes a lot of promises, but then never follows through. They know so-and-so, and can get a good deal on something, or they volunteer to research a proposal, but show up empty-handed at the next meeting; they forgot or got too busy to do the work. And then there are others at the same meeting who sit quietly, but actually do most of the work behind the scenes to keep everything functioning smoothly.

There's an expression that says: "*People may doubt what you say, but they will always believe what you do.*" It is good to tell others about our Catholic faith, but it is much more important to live it.

We teach our children about the importance of going to church on Sunday and giving some of our time back to God; we do this by going to church ourselves; not by just telling them. We teach them by example. We teach people the real truth about our faith by the jokes we tell, the movies we watch, the way we talk about others behind their backs, and by our anger and unhappiness. We teach people about our faith when we're caught quietly helping those in need, showing compassion and concern; when we're joyful and at peace. We need to be humble like Jesus who took our human nature and became like a slave, obediently doing the will of the Father.

Like the high priests that Jesus criticizes in the gospel, I often feel vulnerable as a deacon. I can stand up in front of you and talk about spiritual issues every Sunday, but I am even more accountable when my actions don't match my words; when my family and friends see that I don't walk the talk. I know the sacrifices and good works of so many of you within your families and this community and I feel humbled. I see it also in my own family. One of my brothers may not have been going to church every Sunday, but he took his father-in-law into his home and

helped care for him through the late stages of Alzheimer's disease. He did God's will. He preached his Christian faith much more clearly than his deacon brother could ever do.

It's good to reflect on how you put your faith into action and not just into words. Do you help others? Do you contribute to the church and to Catholic charities that help the poor throughout the world, realizing that your friend and neighbors will never know about your generosity? Jesus said: ***“So by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”*** We need to examine what kind of fruits we produce.

Deacon Joe Hulway