26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

OCTOBER 1, 2023

MATTHEW 21:28-32

A companion of Francis of Assisi, Brother Juniper is remembered as a ‘fool for Christ,’ and there are all sorts of wild stories about his antics. He was notorious for constantly giving his possessions away and living with a winsomeness that sometimes got him in trouble. At one point, he was ordered by a superior not to give away his outer garment to the beggars anymore. But, it wasn’t long before he met someone in need who asked him for some clothing. He said, “My superior has told me under obedience not to give my clothing to anyone. But, if you pull it off my back, I certainly will not prevent you.

Today’s Scripture passages warn us that, it is our final decision for, or against God that is most important because we are rewarded or punished according to it. In the first reading, Ezekiel’s message from the Lord God to Israel answers the objections of those who think it is not fair that ,God should give such weight to one’s final decision ,because a person who, after a very long virtuous life, finally chooses sin will be punished, while another, who finally chooses virtue after a life of loose morals, will be rewarded. Today’s Responsorial Psalm (Ps 25), appeals to God in His compassion and mercy, begging Him to wipe away our sins and extend mercy to us. The second reading, taken from Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, also affirms the truth that the final choice for God, made by perfect obedience to Him, will be rewarded. Paul emphasizes the fact that, because of Christ’s obedience to God’s will, emptying himself, taking human form and humbling himself by accepting death on a cross, that God the Father exalted Christ, bestowed on him the Name above every other name, and made Jesus the recipient of universal adoration. In today’s Gospel parable, a man with two sons tells both to go out to work in the vineyard. The first son says he will not go, but later regrets it and works. The second son says he will go but does not. In each case, it is the final decision that is more important. Jesus says that repentant tax collectors and prostitutes, represented by the first son who initially refused to go, will make their way into the Kingdom of God before the chief priests and the elders, represented by the second son in the parable.

We each need to lead a responsible Christian life, saying “yes” to God. Each one of us is responsible to God for every one of our actions, and the just God will punish or reward each of us according to our actions. As we do not know at what moment death will take us, our only guarantee of dying in God’s friendship is to live in that friendship always, saying “Yes” to God in our deeds. We should become men and women who profess our Faith in word and deed, remembering 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” (Mt 7:21). God is ever with us to strengthen us, to pardon us, and to lift us up again when, through human weakness, we stumble on the road. God is calling us right now, inviting us to work in His vineyard, inviting us to say “Yes” to Him with our words and actions. Let us accept God’s invitation by purifying our hearts in the Sacrament of Reconciliation; by resolving to act upon our promises each morning before we get out of bed; and by declaring interiorly that people will be able to identify us as followers of Christ, not by empty words or pious gestures but simply by our Christian actions. In this way, we shall live a life filled with the joy that doing the will of the Father brings.

Instead of trusting in lame excuses, we need to seek God’s mercy. We often use flimsy excuses to silence our conscience. They run like this: “I didn’t realize how sinful I was”; “I was just too busy with work, family, and a decent social life to have time for Sunday Mass”; “That’s what all my family does – it’s got to be OK!” ; “The devil made me do it – it wasn’t my fault!”; ”I couldn’t be different from everyone else—I’d look stupid!”; “I meant to straighten things out – I just didn’t get to it.” These are not valid excuses at the judgment seat of God. Hence, if we have been disobedient to God in our past life, we need to knock at the door of God’s mercy now. We need to remember that what God, in his mercy did for the tax-collectors and harlots in the parable, the Matthews, the Augustines, the Margarets of Cortona, and the millions of unknown penitents who are now Saints in Heaven, He can, and will, do for us, if we repent of our past sins and renew our lives as the first-asked son in the parable did. It is never too late for us to be transformed.