

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #136

READING I Ezekiel 18:25–28

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

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,**
and **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.**

Ezekiel = ee-ZEE-kee-uhl

The expression that begins this reading is familiar to anyone who has parented young children. There is a little of the petulance of a child in the house of Israel's complaint. God's argument is to turn the tables; he's not unfair but instead the house of Israel behaves unfairly toward him.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 25:4–5, 6–7, 8–9 (6a)

R. 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.

Good and upright is the LORD;
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice,
and teaches the humble his way.

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.

READING I

The chapter of Ezekiel from which our reading comes deals with individual responsibility. Written during the time of Babylonian captivity, the mandates represented here reveal a new chapter in Israelite law. Up to this point, the emphasis was placed on corporate responsibility. Sins committed by parents were understood to be passed on to their children. However, the strong sense of guilt brought about by the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon gave rise to a new sense of individual responsibility, whereby each person could develop

a relationship with God and was responsible for maintaining that relationship.

This reading deals with the consequences of departing from a virtuous way of life in order to pursue some form of wickedness. Speaking the Lord's own words to the people of Israel, Ezekiel begins by challenging them to adjust their understanding of fairness. While they may perceive a certain punishment given by the Lord to be unfair, it is really the actions of people themselves that are unfair. Ezekiel raises the topic of the punishment of death that is given to the one who turns from vir-

tue to wickedness. Death is deemed quite fair for this failure to act responsibly. Similarly, God's fairness will be executed in the life of the one who turns from wickedness to doing what is "right and just." That person's reward shall be the preservation of life. Thus, we see that God's justice—both punishment and reward—is not passed down through the generations; instead, it is a matter of personal culpability.

READING II

After reminding the Philippians of his imprisonment and of the need to persevere in faith,

Philippians = fil-LIP-ee-uhnz

A reading of great and solemn mystery, offering a glimpse into the beliefs and expressions of the members of the early Church.

solace = SOL-uhs (comfort)

Slight pause between "out" and "not."

In this expression lies one of the mystical cores of Christian beliefs, Christ's self-emptying (kenosis). Proclaim it solemnly.

These words probably belong to an ancient hymn Paul records in this letter. Allow for their musical quality to echo in your speech.

READING II Philippians 2:1–11

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians

[**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**,

Paul turns to the topic of the Church's pursuit of unity in a spirit of humility. Employing the evidence of an early Christological hymn in which Christ's exaltation is revealed as a reward for his humility, Paul encourages Christians to have the "same attitude" as Christ.

This reading opens with the reason Christians must pursue the way of unity. Because they belong to Christ and participate in the Spirit, they ought to consider themselves as sharers in the "same mind" and the "same love" that flow from Christ. The way this oneness is most concretely

displayed is in the way in which Christians reject any form of selfishness and consider the needs of others as more important than their own.

Halfway into this reading, Paul introduces what was an early Christian hymn the community might have been aware of to portray the humility of Christ. The first half of the hymn reveals Christ's humble attitude displayed in his rejection of divine power in order to share in the lot of humanity. Instead of grasping at or exploiting his divine nature, Christ became as lowly as a "slave." His humility continues to the cross

where he becomes perfectly "obedient" by accepting his death as part of God's will.

The second half of the hymn praises Christ and describes the reward bestowed upon him by God. God exalts him, places his name over all things in the cosmos, and moves every being to proclaim that "Jesus Christ is Lord!" While this reading does not provide a suggestion as to how to put this hymn into practice, Paul's intention is very clear: Christ's humility and obedience ought to guide all Christian living.

TO KEEP IN MIND

Make eye contact with the assembly.
This helps keep the assembly
engaged with the reading.

In this reading, Jesus uses the techniques of a rabbi to demonstrate to the rabbis the weakness of their own understanding. It's as subtle as it is striking.

First, Jesus sets up a position of defiance followed by compliance.

Next, Jesus sets up compliance followed by defiance.

When Jesus says "Amen," he brings home his parable to the present situation, speaking with the chief priests and elders.

Slight pause between "later" and "change."

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.**

[Shorter: Philippians 2:1–5 (see brackets)]

GOSPEL Matthew 21:28–32

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

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."

GOSPEL

This encounter between Jesus and powerful religious leaders takes place in the Jerusalem Temple. These authorities have been questioning Jesus on the source of his authority to teach. Rather than providing a solid answer, Jesus tells them the parable of the two sons in order to point out their stubbornness in failing to recognize and respond to God's will when it ought to be fully apparent before their very eyes (that is, in the teaching and ministry of Jesus himself).

Jesus employs the image of a vineyard, which is a popular metaphor for the

nation of Israel (Isaiah 5:1–7) as well as for the kingdom of God (Matthew 20:1; 21:33). However, the focus of this parable is not on the vineyard but on the attitude of the two sons. The first son, who blatantly tells his father that he will not work in the vineyard, changes his mind and responds obediently to his father's summons. This first son represents the "tax collectors" and "prostitutes," who are deemed sinners, and yet prove themselves open to conversion. The second son, who tells his father that he will work in the vineyard but does not go, represents those who have been questioning

the authority of Jesus. They appear to be righteous, but they fail to be open to the coming of God's kingdom (alluded to here in the ministry of John the Baptist). This parable, which is unique to Matthew, clearly speaks to the infant Church of the constant need for conversion in carrying out the will of God; discipleship must involve no sense of hesitancy or complacency. S.W.