

There once was a man who came to know Jesus and wanted to be baptized. The whole parish supported him and he was baptized along with several others at the Easter Vigil Liturgy. Things seemed to be going smoothly with his newly minted faith. Prayer flowed easily from his lips and heart. He never went by a homeless person who was on a street corner without speaking to him and giving change when he could. He participated in Mass every weekend, sang in the choir and was involved in an adult small faith-sharing group.

After a while things changed. What he once did with joy was now felt like an obligation. When someone asked him to pray for a special intention, he'd say, "Of course!" with enthusiasm and then forget to. He avoided the homeless person on the corner by taking another entrance at work. He participated in Mass on Sundays less frequently. He also withdrew from other areas of parish life in which he had been involved. He still believed in God and felt love for God, but these pieces of his life now seemed too hard, too much. Finally, his parish community who witnessed his baptism and vowed to do all in their power to support him in his life in Christ, never saw him again.

We all have good intentions. But Ezekiel in the first reading and Jesus in the Gospel today teach us our intentions alone are not enough. It's our actions grounded in and flowing from our relationship with God that count.

Jesus gives a telling example in his parable today about the two sons being asked to work in the vineyard. The first son tells his father outright that he won't do it, but then has a change of heart and goes and does it anyway. The second son, however, tells his father he's going to the vineyard, but never does.

We often do similar things in our own lives. We say we are Christians, but how do we know? How do others know? Each year the month of October in our country is dedicated to study and advocating for the body of Church teaching on issues of human life and dignity: abortion, embryonic stem cell technology, marriage as a permanent union

between one man and one woman, euthanasia, advocacy for universal access to health care, just wages that allow people to provide food, shelter and clothing and other basic benefits for themselves and their families, just and compassionate immigration policy which permits immigration and emigration as well as providing the legitimate responsibility of a nation for its security, opposition to the use of the death penalty as a means of restitution for crime. To assist us in understanding some of these issues each Sunday's Bulletin will include an insert addressing a particular issue and the accompanying Church teaching. Do we pay "lip service" to Church teaching on these and other life issues, but when it comes to public advocacy and voting for candidates for public legislative or executive office, pick and choose those that align with a particular partisan political party's agenda while simultaneously ignoring or outright rejecting Church teaching on those that do not? How willing is each of us to risk ridicule for the sake of Jesus? Is my discipleship and Church membership something I practice here on the weekend, but leave behind when I walk out the door until the next time I show up? I don't pretend these are easy or comfortable questions. They're not. But they are questions Ezekiel and Jesus challenge us to examine ourselves on today.

We aren't perfect. We all are guilty, like the second son in the parable in today's gospel, of hypocrisy. As one commentator put it, "Either we've got to pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we've got to acknowledge that he commanded us to love the poor and serve the needy without condition; and then admit that we just don't want to do it."

But there is hope for us! We can be like the first son and have a change of heart. We can all be touched and changed by divine grace. That is what conversion/metanoia is all about! We can choose to turn away from doing our will to striving to do God's will as we state each time we pray "thy will be done" in the 'Our Father.' We can choose to be obedient to God even after initially saying "no." God never closes the door to us. God always invites us to be more than we are right now. We can change. We can grow. We can, with God's help, both talk the talk and walk the walk.

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