

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

### **First reading:**

(Ezekiel 18.25-28)

*Attitudes to Sinners*

The prophet Ezekiel was speaking in Babylon during the exile of the Jews there after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Not surprisingly, the second generation of exiles were questioning why they should suffer for the failures of their forefathers. This was, however, a new phase in the development of morality, for beforehand the sense of solidarity with family or clan had been so strong that it was assumed that punishment for the sins and failures of an individual would affect the whole clan or family. Now the individual is to be held responsible for his or her own sins only.

Furthermore, the individual cannot simply rely on good deeds of the past, or feel irremediably condemned for failures in the past. Conversion in both directions is possible: just as the good person can become evil, so the evil person can change direction.

At the end, the Lord promises conversion to the good, a new heart and a new spirit, so that even the sinner can repent and live.

### **Question:**

*What sort of qualities are needed to help a person change their ways?*

### **Second reading:**

(Philippians 2.1-11)

*A Hymn to Christ*

This is a wonderful hymn of Christ's self-emptying and his exaltation and vindication by the Father, probably an ancient Christian hymn celebrating the triumph of Christ, which Paul adopted and used for himself.

In the first half of the reading, Paul shows the warmth of his joy as a pastor in the fellowship of his young community at Philippi, although the fact of this strong appeal for unity may suggest that he is painting an optimistic picture of their single mindedness! He also gently chides them for their vanity, and the reason why he includes the hymn is to show that the path of humility is the way to exaltation.

The hymn itself contrasts Christ, the Second Adam, with Adam (that is, humanity) who fell, who wanted to be like God, who tried to escape death, tried to exalt himself and was humbled.

The last verses are one of the clearest statements in Paul of the divine character of Christ. A verse from Isaiah 45 .23 is applied to Christ. In Isaiah, the verse describes the homage due to the Lord alone, and no one else. In the hymn, this divine homage is paid to Christ - and this is to the glory of God the Father. The concept of divinity is expanded to include Christ.

### **Question:**

*What would your answer to this be? A Muslim once said to me: 'If you say your Jesus was God, you just don't understand what God is.'*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Matthew 21.28-32)*

### *Parable of the Two Sons*

Matthew loves giving parables of Jesus contrasting 'goodies' and 'baddies' like these two contrasting sons. Matthew's parables put everything in black and white with no shades of grey (wise and foolish wedding attendants, sheep and goats).

Luke uses a different kind of parable, in which the characters - just like us - often do the right thing for the wrong reason. The sayings of Jesus were transmitted by word of mouth for some years before being written down. Did the straightforward contrast in Matthew (it is odd that both change their minds without a reason) develop into Luke's parable of the Prodigal Son? Both times the 'goodie' son ends up bad, and the 'baddie' son ends up good, but in Luke's version both changes of mind are motivated, and there is great emphasis on the son's repentance and the father's overwhelming joy at getting him back.

The lesson in Matthew's story is given also by Jesus' word in the Sermon on the Mount, 'It is not anyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord" who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in Heaven.' It is no use simply saying that Christ is our 'Lord', we have to express it in our behaviour.

## **Question:**

What does this say about hypocrisy in religion?

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