

Homily 26OrdA
Oct. 1, 2017
St. Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

This morning's Gospel raises some obvious questions:

Are we people of our word?
Do we really mean what we say?

Are we like the second son, saying that we are followers of Jesus, that we are willing to be obedient to Him, that we are good Catholics, and yet our actions don't match up with our words?

Are we truly working in the vineyard, learning more and more about our faith and bringing others into a deeper relationship with Jesus and His Church?

At least the first son was honest in telling his father no – he wasn't willing to work in the father's vineyard. But then his conscience got to him, and he changed his mind.

The first son reminds us that the test of our faith is not what we say in a single moment. It's what we decide and do over time.

We might have said no to God at some point in our life and really meant it. We might have been away from the Church or been lukewarm, indifferent Catholics, but that can change.

Many of you are parents. Maybe some of your children are not living their faith. Maybe some of them have rejected the Catholic Church.

The story of the first son encourages us to be patient. The story isn't over.

I've heard many parents say that, once a child turns 18, their parenting of that child is over. The child is on his or her own after that. That wasn't my experience.

Like the father in the Gospel today, I have 2 sons. I would say that both of them were like son #1 in the Gospel, at least when they were in high school. They pretty much said no to their Catholic faith.

As an example, one Sunday night at the dinner table, my youngest son, who was in a Confirmation class at our parish, said he did not want to go to that class after dinner. "Why should I go?" he asked.

I said to him, “If you want to commit your life to Christ and you want to have the power of the Holy Spirit to help you live up to that commitment, you should be confirmed.”

He replied, “I’m not ready to make that commitment.” So I told him, “Then don’t be confirmed.” He dropped out of the Confirmation class.

Four years later, when he was a junior in college, this same son called me on the phone and told me he had signed up for a Confirmation class. He and a friend of his from college were later confirmed with a group of 8th graders.

Some time between then and his graduation when he was home for a break from college, he and I and our oldest son went to an Irish bar in Tulsa one Sunday afternoon and spent two hours talking about the Eucharist. Not a bad way to spend your time.

Think of the father in today’s Gospel, disappointed in both of his sons. So he’s in the vineyard one day, working very hard, and he hears someone behind him. He turns around, and there is son #1, dressed and ready for work. Think of the joy the father felt at that moment.

Today, both of my sons are rock solid Catholics, husbands and fathers. Most of their spiritual development took place when they were between the ages of 18 and 22. It wasn’t dramatic, but it was steady.

If working in the vineyard is a way of referring to going deeper in our faith and sharing our faith effectively with others, what are the steps in the process? I can think of 6 main steps.

One is commitment, to surrender our lives to Jesus and choose to obey Him in all things.

Two is study, constantly growing in our understanding of the Bible and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Three is prayer, prayer for ourselves and for those who are entrusted to us in some way, people that we have some influence with.

Four is watching for opportunities for when the Holy Spirit wants us to reach out to share out faith with another person.

Five is making sure that our yes means yes. If we want to influence others, especially our own children, regardless of their age, we have to walk the talk. Others need to know the difference that our faith in Jesus has made in our lives.

Six, and I'll close with this one. We should try our very hardest never to be late for work.