

26th Sunday of Ordinary Time Cycle A – October 1, 2017

“The Fork in the Road to Heaven”

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Philippians 2:1-11

Matthew 21:28-32

“When you come to the fork in the road, take it.”-Yogi Berra

This is by far one of the most famous quotes from Yogi Berra whom I consider to be one of the greatest accidental philosophers of all time. I say this because although his quotes often *SEEM* to lack any logic on the surface, in my opinion, many of them convey a certain truth that can be gleaned from his humble flubs if one takes the time to dig a little deeper. And even though he said, “I never said most of the things I said” the Yogi-isms and Berra-ism attributed to him have been a source of inspiration for me.

This quote about the fork in the road seems particularly poignant for our readings today because these readings deal with how faithfully we DO the will of God in our lives through our actions. These ACTIONS follow from the CHOICES we make when faced with the “fork in the road”. When we come to the “forks in the road” in life, when we must decide what to do or *not* do; which path to take or avoid and it is through our faith, based on a true belief in Christ, that guides us. But we also know that our choices aren’t always the right ones and our readings show us it is also in these times that in His mercy He will give us another chance and set us straight and guide us down the path that leads to Himself in Heaven.

DOING what is right or not, this is what Jesus’ parable to the Pharisees is all about. THIS passage from Matthew follows Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem that we celebrate on Palm Sunday. As such the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees is reaching its climax; Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers and addresses the Pharisees in a series of parables in order to correct them in the error of their ways. This parable of the two sons is one of these parables. The message of this parable seems to us to be an obvious one: ultimately,

we are in conformity of the will of God when we ACT in a righteous way regardless of our initial disposition.

In other words, our actions speak louder than words, so to speak.

The Pharisees, for so long, obsessed more about laws, customs and traditions that the reason for them, solidarity and cooperation with God's will, was lost along the way. They chose to not put their beliefs into action and therefore had become like the second son who promised to go to the vineyard but didn't.

Conversely, sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes and the like who made horrible choices and entered into a life of sins through THEIR actions, saw in Christ mercy, forgiveness and the promise of God incarnate. They underwent a conversion of heart that led them away from sin and toward the path that instead leads to the vineyard of Christ the Vine. They grafted themselves to Him in order to be His branches conforming themselves to Christ like Paul refers to in our second reading. They also fulfill, in a sense, what we heard in Ezekiel, *"but if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life."*

All of these ACTIONS are predicated on the CHOICES of the individual involved. Just like the two sons in the parable, each has a choice to make; despite the initial response, it is ultimately the ACTIONS that determine the righteousness, or lack thereof, on which we will be judged. Each of us can probably identify with both of the sons at one time or another in our lives and this is why I find these readings today so powerful and hopeful. Although I'm sure we've all failed to do something we should have, or done something that we really didn't necessarily want to do but did because it was right. Each of us faces choices every day of our lives that bring us to the "fork in the road", and we must take it. One way or another we must choose what to do and then choose to either do it or not. Many of these choices may not seem to be life or death nor balance on the razor's edge of right and wrong but over time, the more we take the wrong fork in the road, as it were, the further we stray.

Through prayer, through faith, through a DESIRE to DO what is right, God will be with us to show us the way. *"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"* as we heard in our Responsorial Psalm. Seeking the mercy of God for the wrong

choices we've made and seeking Him in times of decision making can help us to know the path we must take when we come to the "fork in the road". Another one of my favorite quotes from one of my favorite NON-accidental philosophers and spiritual writers, Thomas Merton sums all this up this way:

*"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that
I think I am following Your will does not mean that I am
actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that, if I do this, You will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost
and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for You are ever with me,
and You will never leave me to face my perils alone."*

With this in mind, "when you come to the fork in the road, take it!" the desire to DO God's will, will always guide your way.