



Fr Tom says:

“Choices! Choices! Choices!”

From the moment we wake in the morning we are faced with choices. Do I get up now or shall I have another five minutes? Will I have breakfast? What shall I wear? At every turn we face choices. However, for many of us, the most important choice that we have to make in life is made for us. We were baptised before we were able to make our own decision. It is no wonder, therefore, that, later on, we want to make our own choice either to embrace the decision made for us or to reject it. This is something like the story Jesus told his disciples. One says YES but does nothing about it, the other says NO but thinks better of it and then does what he has been asked.

Jesus story focuses on obedience but does not examine (probably for good reason) the intentions of the two sons. For instance the one who says yes but does not follow it up may have become ill and incapacitated and was unable to do what he had wanted to do. The other son may have been given a cash incentive by an interested party to make him do what he had been asked. But there are many other possibilities that could affect the way we understand the story. Today we place great emphasis on intention with which an action is done and rightly so. However, if we return to basics, the job being done or not being done will always have consequences on others, if not done the harvest could be spoilt and its value depleted or lost. It may have inconvenienced someone else to go and do the work etc. A good harvest could mean cheaper prices for everyone. What we do (and do not do) has consequences on others either positively or negatively. This will help us understand the first reading better.

In countries of Asia and Africa any decision made by a young person has to be vetted by the family. If then the young person fails to fulfil his or her commitment it reflects on the whole family and he or she is answerable to them. Although young people in this country may make their own decisions, the lives they lead, good or bad, will reflect on the whole family and, similarly, so will the lives of their parents reflect and influence what people will think of them. In this sense the sins of our fathers do have a negative effect on the lives of their children. What is clear from today’s Gospel is that God does not punish the children for the wrongdoings of their forbears. On the contrary God is only too happy to help them.

But there is a second element to Jesus words. In God’s world there is no ‘them’ and ‘us’ since all are welcome in his family. We should never develop this way of looking at the world and its people whatever their culture, faith or background. All have a place in God’s family if they are willing to take it. The people Jesus was talking to had a different view. The US, as they thought of themselves, were those who kept the law did all that was required of them but saw law-breakers and sinners as outsiders just like the Gentiles. We are encouraged never to just look at the outside or what is observable, we can too often be wrong. Everyone we encounter is a potential member of God’s family and we should treat them as such!