

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

God,
you are always true to us
and keep your promises.
Forgive us
when we do wrong;
help us to see our faults,
and make us quick
to carry out your commands.
We pray this prayer to you
through Jesus, your Son,
who lives with you,
forever and ever.

FOCUS OF THE READINGS:

Both readings focus on the mercy of God for sinners. In their earlier history, the Israelites tended to think almost exclusively in communal terms: communal guilt, communal punishment. Here Ezekiel presents the corrective to that extreme: individual responsibility for individual sin. The truth is in the balance of the two. The major focus, however, when seen with our Gospel reading, is that God always allows the freedom and opportunity to change.

The Gospel presents this in parable form. It is the story of each of us. Sometimes we say yes, and we don't act. Sometimes we rebel and say no—but later have a change of heart and act! God is primarily interested in our final option! God does not hold past sin against us. God hopes and waits for our obedient response.

FIRST READING: *Ezekiel 18:25-28*

This is a reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

Our God says:

“This is how I am:
when people turn away from me and sin,
they are punished for it.
But when people are sorry for their sins,
change their lives, and do what is right,
they are not punished; they are saved.”

The Word of the Lord.

RESPONSE: *Psalm 15*

RESPONSE:

We will live with you, O God, we will live for - ev - er.

VERSES:

1. When we do speak what is right.
2. When we speak the truth.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

“Change your lives and be - lieve in me, “Al - le -
lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!”

GOSPEL: *Matthew 21:28-32*

This is a reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

Jesus said to the chief priests
and the leaders of the people,

"I'm going to tell you a story,
and you tell me what you think about it.

"There was a man who had two sons.

"One day he said to one of them,

'Son, I want you to go out
and work in the vineyard today.'

"The boy said, 'No, I won't go.'

"But, later, the boy was sorry
that he had said 'no' to his father,
and so he did go.

"The father then said to his other son,

'Son, I want you to go out
and work in the field today.'

"The second son said,

'Yes, father, I will go and work.'

"But he did not go.

"Now tell me, Jesus asked,
which boy did what the father
wanted him to do, the first son or the second?"

The leaders answered,

"The first son."

Jesus said to them,

"I'm telling you the truth.

People you look down on as sinners
are going to enter the reign of God before you.
Because, when John the Baptist came
and preached the truth,
you didn't believe him.

But the people you look down on as sinners
believed him and changed their lives.
And even after you saw that they believed
and changed their lives,
you still didn't believe and change your lives."

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECTING ON THE READINGS
WITH CHILDREN:

What does the Gospel say to you
today?

After the Gospel, help the children
to see that it is how we act that is
important. Sometimes we don't want
to act like Jesus—like the first son in
the story. But after we think about
it, we know we want to. Jesus was
telling this story to some people who
were like the second son. They *said*
they would do what God wanted, but
they didn't do it. When God sent
John the Baptist to preach to them,
they wouldn't listen to him. Instead
of listening for God's Word, they were
busy judging other people. But Jesus
told them that it isn't enough to say
something. What's important is that
we really do what God wants.

It's hard to escape a "moral"
attitude with these readings. We
don't want to moralize with the
children. But we do need to help
them see that there are certain
things God wants us to do. They
should understand from the Gospel
reading that, as good daughters and
sons of God, we don't always respond
immediately in the best way, but that
we can always do better. God always
loves us. What Jesus criticized was
the attitude of the chief priests and
leaders—they thought they were
better than others. Jesus praises
those who were sinners but believed
in him and changed their lives.

You may wish to have three
children participate in the reading, as
narrator and the two sons. Even this
little touch may help the children
enter more into the story.