# 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.

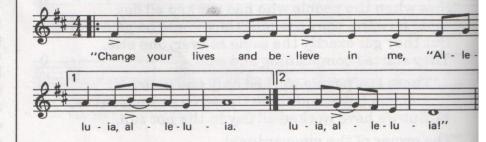
But when people are sorry for their sins, change their lives, and do what is right, they are not punished; they are saved."

The Word of the Lord.

#### RESPONSE: Psalm 15



#### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:



### 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.