Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Gospel text (*Mt* 21:28-32): Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir, 'but did not go.

Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."

"Which of the two did his father's will?"

Dr. Josef ARQUER
(Berlin, Germany)

Today, we contemplate the father and owner of the vineyard asking his two sons: “Son, go out and work in the vineyard today” (Mt 21:29). One says “yes”, and doesn't go. The other says “no”, and goes. Neither of them keeps their word.

Surely, the one who says “yes” and stays at home doesn't intend to deceive his father. It's likely just laziness, not just “laziness to do”, but also to reflect. His motto: “Why should I care about what I said yesterday?”

The one who said “no” does care about what he said the day before. He regrets his slight towards his father. Out of sorrow, he musters the courage to correct his actions. He rectifies the false word with a sure action. “Errare, humanum est?” (To err is human?). Yes, but to make corrections is even more human and more in line with the inner truth inscribed in us. Though it's hard, because it means to humble oneself, crushing pride and vanity. At times, we might have experienced such moments: rectifying a hasty decision, a rash judgment, an unfair evaluation... Afterward, a sigh of relief: Thank you, Lord!

"Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you” (Mt 21:31). Saint John Chrysostom highlights the Lord's psychological acumen towards those "chief priests": "For

neither did He say at once, wherefore believed ye not John? But what was much more pricking, when, He had put forward the publicans and the harlots, then He added this, by the order of their actions convicting their unpardonable conduct, and showing that for fear of men they do all things, and for vainglory."

Perhaps, when we contemplate the scene, we may--with the Lord's permission--imagine a third son there-- prone to half-measures, in whose demeanor it would be easier for us to recognize ourselves and, feeling ashamed, ask for forgiveness. We hear him answer the father in a muted voice: "Maybe yes, maybe no…". And some say they heard the end: "Most likely, perhaps, who knows…".

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "There is nothing, no matter how easy it is, that our lukewarmness does not present to us as difficult and heavy" (St. John Chrysostom)

- "In this transformation of "no" into "yes", in this insertion of the creatural will into the will of the Father, he transforms humanity and redeems us. And he invites us to be part of his movement: to emerge from our "no" and to enter into the "yes" of the Son" (Benedict XVI)

- "God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' co-operation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of almighty God's greatness and goodness…" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n 306)