

TWENTY SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (9/27-28/2008)

Ezekiel 18/25-28, Psalm 25, Philippians 2/1-11, Matthew 21/28-32

The first reading from the prophet Ezekiel today would have made a great introduction to last week's Gospel passage. Remember how that went?

Jesus told the parable about the vineyard owner who paid the hired men who worked all day long the same wages as he paid those men who only labored for an hour or so.

Today, Ezekiel quotes the Lord: *"You say, 'The Lord's way is not fair!' Hear now, House of Israel. Is it my way that is unfair, or, rather, are not your ways unfair?"*

Right on, Ezekiel!

The Gospel story today is so human, so familiar, and once more involves food growing.

Two sons are asked by their father to go out into the fields to work.

One says he won't go, and subsequently has a change of heart; eventually he goes.

The other is all smiles and nods when his father makes the same request of him.

In the end, however, he chooses not to go.

With this parable, Jesus is hinting at why he spends time with sinners and outcasts.

Yes, they have shown a reluctance to do God's will by their actions, but somehow or other, they can turn from sin and end up in God's good graces.

On the other hand, the chief priests and elders are always piously bowing and scraping before the Lord God, but, when the Kingdom of God makes its appearance in their midst in the person of Jesus, they turn their attention elsewhere.

To which of these groups do we belong?

Too many of us, unfortunately, are like the religious authorities whom Jesus addressed.

We make all the right noises, we observe all the niceties of our religion, but there is often something missing.

A generous heart, a willing spirit, a genuine openness, something.

It reminds me of a long dead friend of my family.

He was a reformed alcoholic, who had literally quit drinking under his own will-power.

He must have figured that everyone could do as he had done, and he had nothing but disdain for those who were unable to break their addiction.

This hypercritical attitude flowed over into his handling of other occasions as well.

He could be judgmental and sharp-tongued and angry in his willingness to critique just about everyone he met; when all was said and done he was a pretty sad individual.

His negativity prompts me to say that there should be a healthy and joyful wholeness about the true disciple of Jesus, leaving no room for unkind judgment, for recriminations, for selfishness and niggardly actions.

Out of that wholeness comes a certain acceptance of God's will, and a deep-down joy that suffuses everything.

For such a disciple, it's easy to say "yes" and to mean it.

I think it was St. Paul who said that God loves a cheerful giver.

The fact is we all do.