

Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
26th Sunday of Ordinary Time
2026—A Cycle



What do I see?

“[Jesus said] “Tell me what you think of this story. A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go out for the day and work in the vineyard.’ The son answered, ‘I don’t want to.’ Later, he thought better of it and went. The father gave the same command to the second son. He answered, ‘Sure. Glad to!’ But he never went.”—Matthew 21: 28-32 [Note: This is *not* the better known and longer “prodigal son” parable found in Luke 15: 11-32.]

How has this parable of parent and offspring played itself out in my life... first as a child and young adult? And later in my home, when I found myself in the parent role?

Image: [Eugene Burnand](#)’s monochrome of “The Two Sons”

Opening Prayer

A Parent’s Prayer When Feeling Discouraged

Heavenly Father,
I thank you for another day of life.
Psalm 139 reminds me that...
you know when I sit... and when I rise.
You know my every thought.
I need you to take control of my thoughts.
Help me to see myself... and my life...
through your eyes.

You are not a God of chaos... but of order...
so please give me clarity of thought.
Help me to take my focus off myself...
Keep my eyes firmly fixed on you... so I don't sink.
When I can't take another step... carry me.
Give me courage to take one more step...
hang on one more day.
When it feels too hard to get through the next *day*...
help me focus on the next hour.
Help me recall past times...
when you brought me through a tough situation.
Help me to give you all the honor and glory.
Amen.

Source: [Chandra Sparks Splond](#) from her online [blog](#) (abridged)

Scripture Readings

Ezekiel 18: 25-28 “Do I hear you saying, ‘That’s not fair?’ God’s not fair?
Listen, Israel. I’m not fair? You’re the ones who aren’t fair!”

Psalms 25: 4-9 “Show me how you work, God. School me in your ways.”

Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 2: 1-11 “God lifted [Jesus] high and honored
him far beyond anyone or anything, ever.”

Matthew 21: 28-32 “Jesus said, ‘Yes, and I tell you that crooks and whores are
going to precede you into God’s kingdom.’”

Introduction to the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Like our opening prayer, this weekend’s Scriptures call us to *humble honesty* regarding our weaker tendencies. Ezekiel prophesied the destruction of Judah’s capital city Jerusalem in 587 BC/BCE, when the Neo-Babylonian Empire conquered Jerusalem and destroyed [Solomon’s Temple](#). They mainly sent the Jewish upper classes into captivity. (Recall that the Prophet Jeremiah got left behind.) Ezekiel died in exile but prophesied the eventual restoration of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. It’s believed that he died around 570 BC/BCE. [Ezekiel’s Tomb](#) is a Jewish religious site in Mesopotamia. In 539, the Persian empire overcame [Nebuchadnezzar II](#)’s armies and conquered Babylon. The [Edict of Cyrus](#) repatriated the exiles.

In his old age, the once mighty but now feeble [King David](#) composed Psalm 25. It offered a model *act of contrition* in which he publicly admitted his guilt and begged Yahweh’s mercy.

In his letter to the Philippians, St. Paul spoke with amazement about how Jesus “emptied himself” of divinity to take on our human flesh and blood. That realization should *amaze* us too, to the point of doing nothing solely out of self-interest: “Each

of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others.”

In Matthew 21: 28ff, Jesus offered this parable as an object lesson to his opponents... “A man had two sons....” Note that this isn’t the better-known “Prodigal Son” parable. In this story, he targeted the chief priests who refused to recognize John the Baptist as a true messenger of God. By contrast, he blessed all those willing to change their minds after straying from their commitments. Jesus praised the errant son’s *second-thought* humility and challenged his listeners (and us) to follow that young man’s example.

Reading from the Book of Ezekiel (18: 25-28)

“Do I hear you saying that’s not fair? *God’s* not fair? Listen, Israel. I’m not fair? *You’re* the ones who aren’t fair! If a good person turns away from his good life and takes up sinning, he’ll die for it. He’ll die for his own sin. Likewise, if a bad person turns away from his bad life and starts living a good life, a fair life, he will save his life. Because he faces up to all the wrongs he’s committed and puts them behind him, he will live, really live. He won’t die.

“And yet Israel keeps on whining, ‘That’s not fair! God’s not fair.’ *I’m* not fair, Israel? *You’re* the ones who aren’t fair.”

Personal Reflection

This passage affirms and rewards those who reverse course and do the right thing. When a wicked person turns from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will preserve his life.

— *Regardless of the date of my baptism, at what particular time did I truly and consciously “convert to Christ,” setting aside my own self-interest to conform more closely to life with Jesus? What was wrong with my former path? What triggered my course change?*

Psalm 25 (4-9)

A prayer for protection and forgiveness

Remember your mercies, Lord.

Show me how you work, God,
school me in your ways.

Take me by the hand.

Remember your mercies, Lord.

Lead me down the paths of truth.

You’re my savior, aren’t you?

Mark the milestones of your mercy and love.

Rebuild the ancient landmarks!

Remember your mercies, Lord.

Forget that I sowed wild oats;
mark me with your sign of love.
Plan only the best for me, God!
Remember your mercies, Lord.

God is fair and just and corrects the misdirected,
sending them in the right direction,
giving the rejects his hand
and leading them step by step.
Remember your mercies, Lord.

Personal Reflection

“Forget that I sowed wild oats.” David’s sad and brave admission of guilt should give us courage to lay our faults at the feet of our God. We easily identify with the plight of the psalmist. Yahweh is our teacher and model. Our Loving Guide marks the way in front of us. We need to watch and follow him. At times, he will turn around to see if we’re still there. This psalm offers a model ‘act of contrition.’ It doesn’t stir up *emotional* sorrow. It simply states the case, admits our guilt, and asks for mercy.

A now older, wiser King David sang to Yahweh, “Show me how you work, God, school me in your ways. Take me by the hand.”

— *Am I a “glass half-full” person like the elderly David, or more of a “glass half-empty” type like the younger, know-it-all king? How hard is it for me to remain hopeful during challenging times? What is my “turn-to” prayer when life get tough?*

From St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians (2: 1-11)

“If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ, *if* his love has made any difference in your life, *if* being in community of the Spirit means anything to you, *if* you have a heart, *if* you care—then *do me a favor*.

Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

“Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became a human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.

“Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ and call out in praise that he is the master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.”

Personal Reflection

This is one of my personal favorite passages, in all of Paul’s writings. He wrote from prison in Rome in 62 AD/CE. The fledgling Philippian community was only around twelve years old. Speaking of Jesus, Paul said, “When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became a human!” Yes, Jesus became like us in every human way (except sin). It’s hard for us to fathom what that meant then... and still means to us every day we live. Each of us must search our own heart and ask, “Have I ever *emptied* myself in obedience to God?”

Rivalry and conceit work directly contrary to my capacity to “love” whole-heartedly, seek the “deeper spirit” within me, and foster a “loving feeling” in my heart for those around me.

— *What one or two steps will I commit to this week to rid myself of any trace of “conceit” in order to grow in a healthy love of self... and others?*

The Gospel According to Matthew (21: 28-32)

[Jesus said] “Tell me what you think of this story: A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go out for the day and work in the vineyard.’ The son answered, ‘I don’t want to.’ Later on, he thought better of it and went.

“The father gave the same command to the second son. He answered, ‘Sure, glad to!’... but he never went.

“Which of the two sons did what the father asked?

“They answered, ‘The first.’

“Jesus said, ‘Yes. I tell you that crooks and whores are going to precede you into God’s Kingdom. John [the Baptist] came to you showing you the right road. You turned up your nose at him, but the crooks and whores believed him. Even when you saw their changed lives, you didn’t care enough to change and believe him.’”

Personal Reflection

This intimate story lacks the drama and high-pitched emotion of the Prodigal Son parable (Luke 15: 11-32). That said, this parable may be more practical for us modern Christians. Its “yes-no” theme plays out every day in our own homes and in families around the globe, irrespective of nationality. Yes, we each have our own prodigal child stories, as ourselves, as parents, and/or as siblings. We’ll never forget the pain and angst we carried as we nudged our children forward through elementary, junior high, and high school... maybe college too. We still carry that concern as our children—and grandchildren—move into their adult lives. We may even have reached a time when we can only “let go... and let God.” The key message is just that—God is in charge.

— *When did I ever say “no” to a request for assistance but later changed my mind and did what I was asked to do? What motivated me to reverse my decision? How did it turn out in the end?*

For Inspirational Listening and Watching

Listen

[Psalm 25](#) by [Exodus Road Band](#) (4.5 min.)

(If you have access to “Alexa” or “Hey, Google!” or another source of music, you can listen to Exodus Road Band’s lovely repertoire of biblical music.)

Watch

“[Say Yes to Jesus](#)”—a young woman named [Hosanna Wong](#) shares her “come to Jesus” moment. Truly inspiring. (14 min.)

[Four steps to discerning God's will](#) — from [Vision Vocation Guide](#) (2 min.)

“[Come home to Jesus](#)”—2-minute homily by [John Michael Talbot](#)

Preview of Next Weekend’s Scriptures

Readings for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 5: 1-7 “When I expected good grapes, why did I get bitter grapes?”

Psalm 80: 9, 12-16, 19-20 “God, God-of-the-Angel-Armies, come back! Smile your blessing smile.”

Philippians 4: 6-9 “Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray.”

Matthew 21: 33-43 “There was once a man, a wealthy farmer, who planted a vineyard.”

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

A prayer when I need to make a decision in my life...

My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself;

and the fact that I think that I am following your will...

doesn’t mean I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you...

does, in fact, please you.

I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that, if I do this...
you will lead me by the right road...
though I may know nothing about it.
I will trust you always.
Though I may seem lost... and in the shadow of death...
I will not fear... for you are ever with me...
and you will never leave me to face my perils... alone.

Source: [Thomas Merton](#) in [Aleteia.org](#) (generic website)

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from *The Message* Bible
translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)
Peterson's translation of the Bible is a highly interpretive paraphrase,
celebrated for its readability.
Questions and Commentaries © 2026 by Alfred J. Garrotto
(algarrotto@comcast.net)