

# *ctkAlive!* Scripture Study

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020—A Cycle Readings



Parable of the Two Sons

Matthew 21: 28-32

Artist: untraceable

Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Leave the reflection and chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links. Exception: In the course of the lesson, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

### **Opening Prayer**

*(edited for use here)*

#### **A Prayer When You Feel Discouraged**

by [Chandra Sparks Splond](#)

Heavenly Father, I thank you for another day.

Psalm 139: 2 tells me you know when I sit and when I rise.

You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.

I need you to take control of my thoughts.

Help me see myself and my situation through your eyes.

I'm frustrated, overwhelmed, tired, and confused.

You are not a God of chaos, so please give me clarity of thought.

Help me to take my focus off myself and my situation

and keep my eyes firmly planted on you, so I don't sink.

When I can't take another step, carry me.

Show me what to do in my present situation.

Help me to know you have not forgotten me, haven't forsaken me.

Open my eyes to signs you are still here.

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.

If an hour feels too long, help me focus on the next *minute*.  
If that's too much, guide me through the next *second*.

Help me recall those times in the past when you brought me through tough situations.

Help me, when this drought ends, to give you all the honor and glory for bringing me through and to use this test as a testimony.

I humbly pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

### **Introduction to the 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

This weekend's Scriptures call us to humility and honesty regarding our weaker moments.

Ezekiel 18: 26-28 "You say: 'The Lord's way is not just.'"

Ezekiel lived and prophesied before and during the Babylonian Exile (586 BC to about 516 BC). He promised his devastated fellow exiles a better future. This after spending his pre-exile ministry denouncing the false hopes to which his companions had clung. This passage hints at the 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday's Gospel theme of "changing one's mind"—that is, conversion.

—During this time of "shelter-in-place," many of us consider ourselves exiles from the life we knew until six months ago. We took that life for granted as "normal." Perhaps it's easier now for us to identify with the Hebrew exiles' complaints.

Psalm 26: 4-9 "Your ways, O Lord, make known to me."

This psalm of David is a model act of contrition. By now, the once mighty king has grown older. This song reveals a deeper wisdom than people saw in that younger, wilder version of himself. He doesn't stir up superficial sorrow. This is David *publicly* admitting his guilt and begging Yahweh's mercy.

Also, this psalm models the kind of self-knowledge and humility God expects all faithful Christians and Jews to possess and practice.

Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 2: 1-11 "Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory."

Notice that Paul begins this passage with three "ifs." He asks the community at Philippi to rid themselves of negative thoughts and conditions that blunt the message he passed to them at the time of their conversion.

Matthew 21: 28-32 "Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people . . . 'A man had two sons. . . .'"

This parable of Jesus targets the chief priests who refused to recognize John the Baptist as a true messenger of God. By contrast, he blesses all those capable of changing their minds should they stray from their baptismal commitment. Jesus praises the errant son's second-thought humility and challenges us to do the same.

## **A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (18: 25-28)**

“You (faithless people) say: ‘Yahweh’s way is not just!’ Why, Israel! Is my position wrong? Is it not rather yours that is wrong? If the righteous turn from righteous deeds and sin, they die because of their sins. And if the wicked do what is good and right, after turning from the sins they committed, they will save their lives. They will live and not die, because they have opened their eyes; and turned from the sins they committed.”

### **Personal Reflection**

This passage affirms and rewards those capable of reversing course. “If the wicked do what is good and right, after turning from the sins they committed, they will save their lives.”

— *Regardless of my date of baptism, can I recall a particular time when I “converted to Christ,” changing some aspects of my life and actions to conform more closely to the way of Jesus? What was wrong with my former path? What triggered my change of course?*

— *When did I, like many Israelite slaves, accuse God of not treating me fairly? What was going on in my life at that time? When and how did I come to realize that God wasn’t the one responsible for my negative decisions and actions?*

### **Antiphon: Psalm 25 (4-9)**

A prayer for protection and forgiveness

*Remember your mercies, O Lord.*

Teach me your ways, O Yahweh;  
make known to me your paths.  
Guide me in your truth and instruct me,  
for you are my God, my savior;  
I hope in you all day long.

*Remember your mercies, O Lord.*

Remember your compassion, O Yahweh,  
your unfailing love from of old.  
Remember not the sins of my youth,  
but in your love remember me.  
Good and upright, Yahweh teaches sinners *his* way.  
He teaches the humble of heart  
and guides them in what is right.

*Remember your mercies, O Lord.*

### Personal Reflection

“(Yahweh) teaches the humble of heart and guides them in what is right.”

- *Which words stand out as most important in the above verse? Why these words?*

The older, wiser King David, sang to Yahweh, “I hope in you all day long.”

- *Am I a “glass half-full” person like the elderly David, or more of a “glass half-empty” type like the young king? How hard is it for me to remain hopeful during challenging times like the present? (Write about this in your prayer journal.)*

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

“If I may advise you, in the name of Christ, and if you can hear it as the voice of love; if we share the same Spirit, and are capable of mercy and compassion, then I beg of you, make me extremely happy. Have one love, one spirit, one feeling, do nothing through rivalry or vain conceit. On the contrary, let each of you gently consider the others, as more important than yourselves. Do not seek your own interest, but rather the interests of others.

“Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ’s: Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking on the nature of a servant, made in human likeness, and, in his appearance, found, as a man. He humbled himself by being obedient, to death, death on the cross. That is why God exalted him and gave him the name which outshines all names, so that, at the name of Jesus, all knees should bend in heaven, on earth and among the dead, and all tongues proclaim that Christ Jesus is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

### Personal Reflection

“If I may advise you, in the name of Christ, and if you can hear it as the voice of love; if we share the same Spirit. . .”

- *Paul has special affection for the community at Philippi. Why, then, does he preface this passage with three ifs?*

“Make me very happy: have one love, one spirit, one feeling, do nothing through rivalry or vain conceit.”

- *In what area(s) of my life am I most vulnerable to acting out of rivalry or vain*

*conceit?*

- *How aware am I that rivalry and conceit can and do creep into my family life and into my workplace and social contacts? And, how aware am I that rivalry and conceit work directly contrary to my capacity to “love” wholeheartedly to seek the deeper “spirit” within me, and foster a loving “feeling” in my heart?*
- *What one or two steps will I commit to this week to change my “conceit” to healthy self-love? And convert any rivalries into a better understanding of the other person’s positive traits—and my own? What must I change in my life to let go of conceit, resentment, and long-nurtured hurt feelings?*

### **Proclamation from the Gospel according to Matthew (21: 28-32)**

“Jesus went on to say, ‘What do you (*chief priests and teachers of Mosaic Law*) think of this? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said to him, “Son, go and work today in my vineyard.”

“And the son answered, ‘I don’t want to.’ But later, he thought better of it and went.

“Then the father went to his other son and said the same thing to him. This son replied, ‘I will go, sir,’ but he did not go.

“Which of the two did what the father wanted?”

“They answered, ‘The first.’

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you: the publicans (*tax collectors*) and prostitutes are ahead of you on the way to the kingdom of heaven. For John came to show you the way of goodness, and you did not believe him; but the publicans and prostitutes did. You were witnesses of this, but you neither repented nor believed him.’”

### **Personal Reflection**

“You were witnesses of (*John the Baptist’s teaching*), but you neither repented nor believed him; but the publicans and prostitutes did.”

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

— *With which group of Christian witnesses do I most identify, the self-congratulating “holy” men/women? Or the sinners who creep into Mass, sit in a back corner of the church, and pray, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner”?*

## **Shelter-in-Place**

Jesus is not political and cares not to have his name associated with any political party or movement. His concerns are justice and the common good of *all* peoples. It's a given that no candidate for any office, national or local, is perfect. My votes for all national and local offices, and even propositions and measures, call for thoughtful discernment. This a major decision point, especially for Catholics. To vote sensibly, I need to weigh both the good and not so good of each candidate and issue in coming to a final decision. (*A greater evil might be the decision not to vote at all!*)

— *How convinced am I that casting my vote for one candidate in favor of another is a moral decision? How willing am I to vote for a candidate I might consider as the "lesser of two evils"?*

— *If I prefer to vote strictly along party lines, how do I justify that before God? What might influence me to "cross over," voting for a candidate of another party?*

(From last week) In 1886, Congregationalist Church minister Charles Sheldon in Topeka, Kansas, coined the saying, "What would Jesus do?" After 150 years, WWJD remains a popular saying. Our late pastor, Fr. Brian Joyce, gave us this slightly altered—but more challenging—version: "What would Jesus want me to do?"

— *How can I be sure my votes represent what Jesus wants me to do?*

Write about your feelings and your lived experience of these issues during your journaling time (below).

## **Journaling Prompts**

What insights have I gained from reflecting on the readings for the 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time in light of my current social demands and restrictions. Suggested prompt:

— *After reflecting on the three readings, what made the deepest impression on me?*

We mustn't simply be grateful "recipients" of God's good gifts. We also need to "give back."

— *How will this week's Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love—and give back—during the week ahead?*

## For Inspirational Viewing / Listening / Reading

### Watch:

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

(2 min.)

A reflection on the [26th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Matthew 21: 28-32](#)

from the Australian-based [Centre for Christian Spirituality](#)

Bishop David Walker, Fr John Frauenfelder, and Virginia Ryan offer a prayerful reflection on this weekend's Gospel reading (9 min. 40 secs.).

### Listen:

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

(If you have access to "Alexa" or "Hey, Google!" I recommend listening to Exodus Road Band's lovely repertoire of biblical songs.)

## Preview of Next Session

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 5: 1-7 "Let me sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard."

Psalm 80: 9, 12-16, 19-20 "O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven and see, take care of this vine."

Philippians 4: 6-9 "Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen from me. Then, the God of peace will be with you."

Matthew 21: 33-43 "There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press, and built a tower."

## **Closing Prayer**

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

by [Fr. Thomas Merton](#)

*(edited for use here)*

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  
does not 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: [Aleteia.org](http://Aleteia.org)

## **Questions?**

Send any questions or comments you might have to [algarrotto@comcast.net](mailto:algarrotto@comcast.net)

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