

Trinity 16 27/09/2020 Zoom talk given by Fr Terry based on Matthew 21:23-32.

In today's Gospel we are now coming to the end of Jesus' earthly life ...in the verses just before today's passage ..where Jesus pointed to the fig treehe had demonstrated to his Disciples, the importance of faithnow ,he is teaching in the Temple and He is being quizzed by the chief priests and elders "Who has given YOU the power ,the authority to do all these things you have done? teaching ,healing, cleansing of the Temple for a start?" They know he's not a Levite, or a Priest, or a Rabbi. Their question is about who Jesus is, but behind this questioning is the issue of following human made rules or the revelation of God, which can defy human expectations or regulations.

Jesus will only answer them if they first answer HIS question ...this raises a point; do we have to answer every question thrown at us ? We live in culture where some people think they can demand an answer from anyone about any matter THEY want an answer to, even if it isn't any of their business ...Perhaps we might want to ask a question in return ----Jesus did! Perhaps He was saying to them "How do you think it will help you if you know the answer to that question?" The answer to Jesus' question will answer their original question .."Either my authority comes from heaven or it comes from humankind " These questioners are skilled in the Law , and they are certainly not prepared to believe that all this points to John the Baptist or to Jesus ..they have closed their minds to the Revelation of God.

Jesus has put them in a difficult position, if they say that John was from God, they should have repented as he had urged. They would also have to acknowledge his role as a forerunner to Jesus and therefore believe that He is the Christ. What a position they were in, if we say John was from Humans, we are going to lose face and status with the many who have believed that John was a Prophet. Being well-versed in the Law, they thought they knew the answer, but they didn't have the courage to say it publicly. Jesus tells them a Parable about admission to the Kingdom, which can be summed up with the phrase "Actions speak louder than words" The first son refused to work but changed his mind ,he represents the tax collectors and prostitutes who were regarded by the religious elite as scum who had started off by rebelling against God ,yet they responded to the message of John and Jesus and repented, made a new start with God ,turned their back on their old way of life and followed God's ways .Why would Jesus mix with these sort of people ,how often have we heard that phrase in its many different contexts? Don't forget the author of our Gospel was a Tax collector. Reconciliation with God by faith brings about a changed life, repentance leads to God which in turn leads to holiness. (back to the Parable) The second son represents the religious authorities, yes! They acknowledged and studied the rules, but they didn't act on them. They may have appeared respectable, polite, agreeable, but did they put God first? They were more concerned about their own position and popularity, even though they had witnessed the radical transformation of tax collectors and many other so-called dubious characters. They remained unaffected, and outside the Kingdom, the rule

of God and as we know they would add murder to their sins when they conspired in Jesus' execution.

The repentance that God requires is a continuing process. Seeking forgiveness from God continues as we walk with God.

I think this passage today should be ever before us, it certainly shows that Jesus' authority comes from God and that what we need to do is submit to that authority and receive His forgiveness over and over again. This will affect every part of our lives, an apple tree produces apples, a strawberry plant produces strawberries, and so on. Christians should produce fruit that shows what we truly are. Our thoughts, our worship, our words and our deeds should bear testimony to the grace of God in our own lives, not our own goodness, as we continue in our discipleship we should become more like Jesus,.....BUT.....we are also likely to become more aware of our sins and turn from them. This is the work of God, that we need to constantly remind ourselves of as we allow the Holy Spirit to infiltrate our lives more and more.

These days, the word SIN maybe isn't PC, should we rather be saying "morally challenged "? Maybe that's the problem, but in the cold light of day, perhaps sin is the best news ,...there is a way outYou can't repent of confusion or even doubts, and we can't have faith without doubts, we are stuck with them ..but we can repent of sin.....

That is the good news. Sin and repentance are the only grounds for hope and joy....the grounds for reconciled, joyful relationshipsThanks be to God.

Fr. Terry