

# Reflection for the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A

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The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/100123.cfm>

## **1st Reading:** *Ezekiel 18:25–28*

This selection we have from Ezekiel, today, comes from Chapter 18 which is devoted to the concept of individual responsibility and individual punishment or salvation. The Hebrew people have long known that they are saved or doomed as a people, about the corporate damage done by sin and about how the sin of one can affect their family for generations. But where does individual responsibility fit in? The prophet helps to answer that question with the Word of the Lord. Note that when you turn to the Lord, your past infractions are forgotten.

## **2nd Reading:** *Philippians 2:1–11*

We continue almost where we left off last week. Remember that Paul is thinking about his death. He ends his reflection on a positive note and then turns toward instructions for the community. He tells them to live in a way worthy of the Gospel as proof to their enemies of their salvation. Then in our selection today, he admonishes the Philippian community toward unity in Christ and toward imitating the humility of Christ and his willingness to live his life for others. This includes that beautiful hymn about how Christ did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped but came in human likeness. (Phil 2:6-11)

## **Gospel:** *Matthew 21:28–32*

**Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you.**

Mt 21:31b

When I became painfully aware of the great political divide in our country, I tried to understand the colloquial meaning of the term “middle-America” and the anger that was being expressed. That wasn’t easy for me because I don’t live that middle-America. I kind of researched it and discovered what I think are two elements. One is the middle-class and wealthy conservative people of our nation’s heartland. The other is the people in the heartland who feel their quality of life, however defined by them, has diminished for maybe a variety of reasons. There are also people not in middle-America who have joined with them politically.

I point this out because I think the group of people who feel their quality of life has diminished wants what we all want. We want to live in a society wherein we can make a decent living, where we can have enough to raise our families in safety, give our children a bright future, and provide a good lifestyle. There may be other things but I’m pretty sure we all want what we all want, and what we all want is pretty similar even though we might express it differently and think the path to achieving it is different.

The reason I bring this up is so we can reflect on this concept of the Kingdom of God. I usually think of the Kingdom of God as God reigning in my life. That sounds like we just have to obey God but is that all there is. I want something more out of it. I want it to result in me having a decent life.

I think the promise of living in the Kingdom of God is that we will be able to raise our families in psychological, emotional, and spiritual safety. We can give our children a bright psychological, emotional, and spiritual future and provide a good psychological, emotional and spiritual lifestyle. Do you see where I'm going with this?

It takes listening to God, to his Holy Spirit. It takes listening to his guidance for our work in the vineyard, our work of raising our kids, of making a living, of being in relationship, of making life and family decisions. And the benefit is living a good psychological, emotional and spiritual lifestyle.

The chief priests and the elders evidently didn't want to do that although they were willing to give lip service to it. Jesus basically told them, 'If you want the benefits of living in the Kingdom of God, you have to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.'

That's our challenge. Our challenge is to visualize everything that we do, no matter how unimportant it seems, as working in the vineyard, working in the vineyard at the direction of the Master. Let us listen to the direction of the Spirit of God in our lives and live each moment of each day as conscious, intentional disciples.

But how am I supposed to listen to the Spirit, you might ask. ...One suggestion: Remember that question that used to be so popular; "What would Jesus do?" Just switch it up a bit and make it relational. Throughout the day, several times, take a moment to pray, "Lord, what would you have me do?" You'll start hearing the answer eventually, if not right away, and your life will be better for it.

### **Reflection:**

Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. Mt 21:31b

### **Question:**

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

### **Alternative:**

Reflect upon/share about who or what seems to rule your life. Do you live in the kingdom of wealth, of power, of poverty, of fear, of apathy, etc.? What are the negatives of living in that kingdom? What are the positives? What might you gain by letting the Lord reign in your life? What do you need to do to make that happen?

### **Verse by Verse:**

Mt 21:28 "What is your opinion?" | Our lectionary begins this verse with "Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people:", which is not really in Mt 21:28. The Lectionary does that in order to let the hearers know to whom Jesus is speaking. This selection is a continuation of a discussion with this group who were identified when the discussion began in Mt 21:23. Also, this parable only exists in Matthew.

Mt 21:30 "...but afterwards he changed his mind and went." | This could be translated "he repented". (AYBC) & (UBSH)

Mt 21:31b "They answered, the first." | The chief priests and elders realize that righteousness comes from acting out your commitment to God, not just stating it. It is obvious that Jesus is telling them that they must act on what they say.

Mt 21:31c "... tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you" | This could mean that tax collectors and prostitutes are catching on now and the chief priests and elders have not caught on yet. The chief priests and elders are not, right now, entering at all, but of course they could finally change their minds, an option implied by Mt 21:32.

The tax collectors and prostitutes, Jesus is speaking of, are tax collectors and prostitutes who have repented, as is evident from Mt 21:32. Likewise, the Chief priests and elders did not repent, as is evident from the same verse.

The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary says that Matthew's use of the term "Kingdom of God" here means God's kingdom in heaven. It says that when Matthew uses the term "Kingdom of heaven", he is speaking of the messianic community, God's kingdom established here on earth. (AYBC) The UBS Handbook say the two terms are interchangeable.

Mt 21:32 "When John came to you in the way of righteousness..." | This could either mean that John was righteous or was teaching a way of righteousness. (NABRE footnotes) & (UBSH)

Mt 21:32 "...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. | In Matthew's Gospel, John's preaching is "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! (Mt 3:1-2) That is what the Chief priests and elders did not believe.

John's preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven being at hand may lend credence to the thought that the "Kingdom of God", in our selection, should be understood to mean God's kingdom becoming present on earth; the messianic community. That is, by the way, what Jesus taught us to pray for in Matthew's version of the Our Father (Mt 6:9-13).