



Exegesis of the 1st reading, Ez 18: 25-28

God entrusted Ezekiel with the task of looking out for the welfare of the people. Ezekiel, as a descendent of Levi, was a priest, whose day to day work involved the sacrifice of the animal offerings brought to the temple by worshippers in the temple. He was taken as a captive to Babylon during the first deportation of Jew from Jerusalem in 605 B.C. Living in exile, Ezekiel, after experiencing a vision of God, received the call to become a prophet. Its from this vantage point, spending the rest of his life in Babylon, that Ezekiel spoke God's message to his people.

Ezekiel warned the people about making deals with foreign powers, especially Egypt. Because they were God's holy people, the only alliance that would be secure, would be an alliance with God. In the oracle immediately preceding the words proclaimed today, he warns the people that if they do not turn away from sin, and follow the way of the Lord, that they shall die. But if they do turn away from their wicked ways, living by God's law, and caring for the poor, they will surely live. (verses 16-18) Past virtues do not give a person leeway to disregard the mandates of the Gospel in the present. And past sins do not bar someone from receiving forgiveness, and therefore life, from God.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading. Phil 2:1-11

In this letter to the Philippians, written during imprisonment, Paul holds up Jesus as the perfect example for a life of faith, in a two-fold exhortation of unity and humility, wherein Jesus emptied himself, even up to death. It is in this humility that the Son of God, fully human, fully divine, was exalted.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 21:28-32

In many ways, today's Gospel is a commentary on what went before in Mt: 21: 23-27. There, the subject matter was a controversy over the origin of John the Baptist's authority. The controversy is continued in the present Gospel passage.

Two Sons. The controversy is between Jesus and the chief priests and elders of the people. Jesus poses a situation of a man with two sons. The first son was told to go to work in the vineyard. He refused, but later changed his mind and went. The second son received the same mandate. He said yes, but in fact, did not go. Jesus then asked the chief priests and elders which of the two sons actually did the will of the father. They replied that the first son did his father's will. All of this sets the stage



for the point that Jesus was really interested in making.

Trues and false Israel The image of the vineyard is frequently used as a symbol for Israel (Is 5: 1-7). Jesus uses the symbol to make some strong criticisms regarding trues and false Israel, symbolized by the two sons. He pushes the criticism further by declaring that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom before the chief priests and elders.

Who listened to John the Baptist? Outcasts and sinners, exemplified by images of tax collectors and prostitutes, personified the “dregs of society” that listened to John’s message, and later took the message of the “Good News” to heart, while at the same time that message was rejected by those who were the temporal and spiritual leaders of the Jewish people.

HOMILY CONNECTIONS

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING: A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. The Church does not pit one social group against another but instead follows the example of Jesus, who identified with the poor and vulnerable (Mt 25: 31-46). Giving priority concern to the poor and vulnerable strengthens the health of the whole society. The human life and dignity of the poor are most at risk.

“The Church’s love of the poor...is part of her constant tradition. Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings by many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense and liberation.”
Catechism of the Catholic Church nos. 2444, 2448, quoting St John Paul II Centisimus Annus no. 57

“The prime purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good,. ...it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. The extent of their



suffering is a measure of how far we are from being a true community of persons.”
The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops Economic Justice for All no. 88

SUMMARY: Living as a follower of child of God and a follower of Jesus Christ calls for more than one-time actions or words. Christians, build the kingdom of God, exemplified by the image of the vineyard, by obedience, words and actions in conformity with the Word of God.

STORY: There is an ancient Japanese legend that tells of a man who dies and goes to heaven. Heaven is beautiful beyond words. In his journey through paradise the man comes upon a room lined with shelves. On these shelves are stacks of human ears. A heavenly guide explains that the ears belonged to all the people on earth who listened each week to the Word of God but never acted on God’s teachings. Their worship never resulted in action. Therefore, only their ears ended up in heaven.

APPLICATION:

- 1) God is not interested in our telling others “I am a person of faith”. God is interested in us showing others how much we are persons of faith by what we say and do.
- 2) *Option for the Poor and Vulnerable.* A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (**Mt 25:31-46**) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/option-for-the-poor-and-vulnerable.cfm>.
- 3) The preferential option for the poor is a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity,” says Pope John Paul II in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. “It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods.” *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II 1987. Preferential option for the poor is not optional.



- 4) Our faith is not just a weekend obligation, a mystery to be celebrated around the altar on Sunday. It is a pervasive reality to be practiced every day in homes, offices, factories, schools, and businesses across our land. ~[*Economic Justice For All, 25*](#), 1986

CONCLUSION: Words and promises can be empty or have little meaning. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to more than words. We are called to act in humility, living out the teachings of our faith, by standing up for rights and dignity of the poor and vulnerable.

TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST: Having listened to the Word of God, we now prepare to receive the bread of life and the cup of our salvation so as to be strengthened to go out to live by those words.