

Sept. 27, 2020 Mt. 21:23-32 & Ex. 17:1-7

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Stone, Naomi. [The Sacred Invitation](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [How Large is Your Heaven](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

A Christian missionary in the Middle East used to share this parable about the two sons (only verses 28-30) with villagers that he visited and ask: "Which was the better son?" The vast majority answered that the son who said yes to his father even though he did not go to work in the vineyard was without doubt the better son. The son's reply was honorable and respectful. It was what the father wanted to hear. That he never went to work in the vineyard is beside the point, which in the Middle East is always honor. Remember that life in the Middle East is very public. Honor, the core value of this culture, requires such publicity. The dialogue between the father and his sons in this parable takes place not in private, just between two at a time, but rather in public, within view and earshot of many villagers. Like their modern-day descendants, the Middle Eastern villagers in this parable favor the respectful but disobedient son over the disrespectful but obedient son. (What is Jesus doing with this reversal of expectations?)

Pilch, John J. *The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle A*. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1995. Page 142.

Mt. 21:23-32

23 Jesus entered the **temple courts**, and, while he was **teaching**, the **chief priests** and the **elders** of the people came to him. "By what **authority** are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this **authority**?" 24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what **authority** I am doing these things. 25 **John's baptism**--where did it come from? Was it from **heaven**, or from **men**?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From **heaven**,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you **believe him**?' 26 But if we say, 'From **men**'--we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that **John** was a **prophet**." 27 So they answered Jesus, "**We don't know**." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what **authority** I am doing these things.

28 **What do you think?** There was a **man** who had **two sons**. He went to the first and said, '**Son**, go and work today in the **vineyard**.' 29 **I will not**,' he answered, but later he **changed his mind** and went. 30 Then the **father** went to the other **son** and said the same thing. He answered, '**I will, sir**,' but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did what his **father** wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the **truth**, the **tax collectors** and the **prostitutes** are entering the **kingdom of God** ahead of you. 32 For **John** came to you to show you the way of **righteousness**, and you did not **believe him**, but the **tax collectors** and the **prostitutes** did. And even after you saw this, you did not **repent** and **believe him**.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: In some societies honor is the ultimate good, so there a father would prefer the son who said yes but did not go so as to look good before others. What does this say about Jesus' understanding of his Father?

PRAYER: Lord, so often what other people think determines my choices. It is only later in the quiet of my heart that I realize if I had first thought of what **You** think, a better choice could have been made. Little by little, I am starting to learn that love is the only real reason for anything. Help me as I continue to learn through my choices that you desire my loving response above all. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

TEMPLE COURTS: Since the temple proper was relatively small, there were various courts that surrounded it where worship, sacrifices, teaching etc. were held.

Do you know of any comparable places around your place of worship?

TEACHING: By going to the temple courts to teach, Jesus was setting himself up as an authority on religious matters. *How does this set up the situation for confrontation?*

CHIEF PRIESTS / ELDERS: These people were the guardians of religious truth, as it was known at the time.
Who are the guardians of religious truth for you today?

AUTHORITY: Authority is given to those who have a recognizable mastery on an issue.
How do you decide to whom you will 'give authority' in your faith life?

JOHN'S BAPTISM: John was highly regarded and even thought to be the Messiah by a great many people. His baptism therefore would be very significant. This sets up Jesus' question in a very specific way.
What makes John's baptism such a good way to get to the real issue in question?

HEAVEN / MEN: When someone was searching for the source of something it was often set up as either this world or God's world. These polarities established an either/or situation.
What does Jesus do with this method of forcing a false dichotomy? How does he help to show it is a both/and situation? Does the belief in the Incarnation eventually solve this dilemma?

BELIEVE HIM: Three times in this reading we encounter these words. The central issue was being set up as who was to be believed.
If you would have been there for this event, whom do you think you would have believed; the recognized authorities, or Jesus, the unrecognized authority? What would help you with your decision?

PROPHET: With the advent of John, prophecy was reestablished after a very long absence. This was seen as a sign that God was once again engaged with humanity.
How do you 'know' when a 'prophet' is of God?

WE DON'T KNOW: Jesus, with his counter question, makes the "authorities" admit that they don't know.
How does this set the stage for the teaching story to follow?

WHAT DO YOU THINK: As teacher, Jesus sets up a situation that shows those who want to see just who he is and from where his authority comes.
When someone asks you what you think about something, what happens to the way you listen?

MAN / FATHER: God is united with humanity by way of Jesus' humanity.
How does Jesus' humanity help you to connect with God?

TWO SONS: Jesus, the Jew, is revealing that not all Jews are doing the Father's will. They are doing what their culture (see below) expects, but not what God wants. There are many interpretations of the gospel out there today that can help us be either of the two sons.
Can you identify any issues today that could give you this same sort of situation? If so, what are they?

I WILL NOT / I WILL SIR: As always, the stories force us to make a decision on something.
Are there any issues that confront you today that force you to make a loving rather than a politically correct decision?

CHANGED HIS MIND / REPENT: John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. The second son repented of his initial decision and did the will of the father.
When was the last time you found yourself in this position?

TRUTH: Truth reveals the very essence of something.
What 'truth' does this gospel text reveal to you today?

TAX COLLECTORS / PROSTITUTES: These people already knew they needed to change, the self-righteous, by their very nature saw no need to change.
Where are the areas in your life that you know need some changes? How can this story help you identify those areas?

KINGDOM OF GOD: God's kingdom is full of all those who can truly accept his unconditional love.
Is there anything keeping you from accepting this unconditional love? If so, what needs to happen to help you do that?

RIGHTEOUSNESS: Righteousness is the state of being in right relationship with everyone and everything.
What does this story teach about righteousness?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 21: 23-7 // Mk. 11:27-33; Lk. 20:1-8; Mt. 21:23 // Mt. 28:18; Jn. 2:18; Mt. 21:25 // Jn. 3:27; Mt. 21:26 // Mt. 14: 5; 21:32; Mt. 21:31 // Lk. 7:29f;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Ezek. 18:25-28; [Ps. 125: 4-9](#); Phil. 2:1-11; Mt. 21: 28-32; Revised Common Lectionary: Ex. 17: 1-7; [Ps. 78: 1-4, 12-16](#); Phil. 2: 1-13; Mt. 21:23-32;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Jesus' notion of the Kingdom is a different understanding of freedom than that of most religious and secular leaders today. We think of freedom as not having to do what we don't want to do, but divine freedom is the capacity to be fully who we already are, to develop our inherent and true nature, as much as possible—really wanting to do what we know we have to do. Only God can create that freedom inside of us. Love can only proceed from such inner freedom. A mustard seed, yeast, and light—that all develop from within—are some of Jesus' central metaphors for this freedom-loving Reign of God. Richard Rohr

Obedience is the personal response to an imperative made within the context of a social system. The authority represents the collective good or the shared goals which embrace both the "superior" and the "subject." Participation and sharing in the group is made possible only by an enacted commitment to its life which becomes real and concrete in trusting investment in the embodied expressions and symbols of the group or community. The autonomy and freedom of the person is expressed in the gift of self which is offered in the act of obedience. The person is changed and transformed in this exchange to the depth and extent that the desire or will of another has been integrated and assimilated with one's own will. Fr. David Bock O.C.S.O. Talk on obedience given to the AIC on 8/11/12

God is to be found in my honest humanity, in my conscience and my consciousness, in my intelligence, in my memory, and in my will, willingness, and willing." [Fr. Mark Scott](#) 5/4/14

"The best indicator of your level of consciousness is how you deal with life's challenges when they come. Through those challenges, an already unconscious person tends to become more deeply unconscious, and a conscious person more intensely conscious. You can use a challenge to awaken you, or you can allow it to pull you into even deeper sleep." Eckhart Tolle

There is no better way to remain unconscious than to baptize and bless the forms of religion, even prayer itself. Richard Rohr

He, who begins by loving Christianity, better than truth, will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all. - Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), "Aids to Reflection"

We tend to defend vigorously things that in our deepest hearts we are not quite certain about. If we are certain of something we know, it doesn't need defending. - Madeleine L'Engle

Kingdom people are history makers. They break through the small kingdoms of this world to an alternative and much larger world, God's full creation. People who are still living in the false self are history stoppers. They use God and religion to protect their own status and the status quo of the world that sustains them. They are often fearful people, the nice proper folks of every age who think like everybody else thinks and have no power to break through, or as Jesus' opening words put it, "to change" Richard Rohr

We are all pilgrims on the wearisome roads of our life. There is always something ahead of us that we have not yet overtaken. When we do catch up with something it immediately becomes an injunction to leave it behind us and to onwards. Every end becomes a beginning. Karl Rahner - Meditations and Prayers

The church, however, is but one among many groups that struggle to humanize the Powers. God, fortunately, is not solely dependent on the church! In Mt. 25:31-46, those who are declared "blessed" of the Abba are not necessarily Christians, but people who actually behave lovingly toward the hungry, homeless, refugees, and prisoners. They do not act this way because they have been taught that in so doing they do it to Christ. Indeed, they are surprised to learn that their acts of compassion were in fact done to him. Nor do they do it out of duty, or to earn a reward. We do not, in fact, know why they do it, or who they are. They may be atheists, Jews, Muslims; they may be addicts, convicts, whores. The tax collectors and the prostitutes will go into the kingdom of God ahead of some religious people, asserts Jesus. Apparently Jesus' God is interested in one thing only; whether we behave in a way consistent with the divine order that is coming. Our religious preferences, practices, and affiliations are, next to that, a matter of indifference.

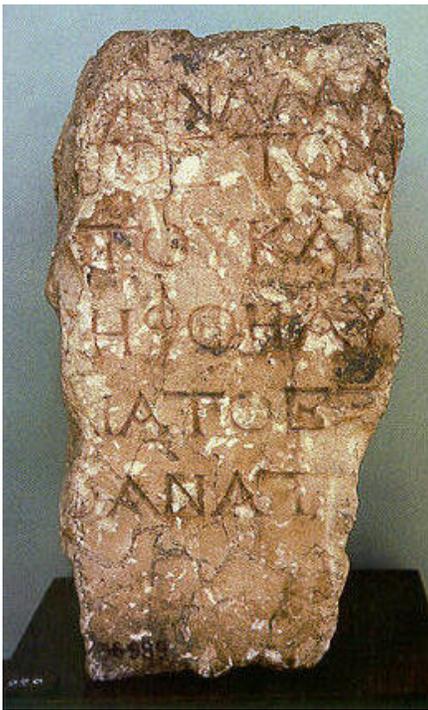
Wink, Walter. *Engaging the Powers*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN. 1992. Page 167f.

The reign of God was the Holy Spirit present and active. The Holy Spirit was the gift Jesus had come to give. Pg. 25.

Goergen, Donald. *Fire of Love: Encountering the Holy Spirit*. NY: Paulist Press. 2006..

I hope you've met at least one Kingdom person in your life. They are surrendered and trustful people. You sense that their life is okay at the core. They have given control to Another and are at peace, which paradoxically allows them to calmly be in control. A Kingdom person lives for what matters, for life in its deepest and lasting sense. There's a kind of gentle absolutism about their life-style, an inner freedom. Kingdom people feel like grounded yet spacious people at the same time, the best of conservative and the best of progressive at the same time. Kingdom people are anchored by their awareness of God's love deep within them and deep within everyone else too. They happily live on a level playing field, where even God has come to "pitch his tent" (the literal translation of [John 1:14](#)). Richard Rohr: Jesus' Plan for a New World, pp. 110-111

"Master," asked James, Joseph's brother, speaking softly to his angry leader, "they are priests of God's altar, chosen and holy. Why were you so harsh with them?" "Good James, and all of you, my Family," he said, "my words are like distant thunder, they announce the coming storm. True, not all priests and scribes are self-righteous, yet their very life at the altar hinders their conversion. While they carefully keep every detail of the laws of ritual worship, they ignore the law of love. Since they are seen by the poor to be holy, they need to truly become holy. Instead, they are like locusts feasting on the harvest field, no more than holy tax collectors. Just as they themselves exclude tax collectors from community, considering them as impure as sinners, so I consider the priests and scribes too impure to be among my intimate disciples. Yet, the kingdom is closed to none! The rich, the powerful, the scribes and priests,



however, by their attitudes exclude themselves. They find the gate to the kingdom too small to get through and the cost too great.”

Hays, Edward. The Gospel of Gabriel. Easton, KS. Forest of Peace Books. 1996. Pages 178-9.

“No foreigner may enter within the railing and enclosure that surround the Temple. Anyone apprehended shall have himself to blame for his consequent death!” This Greek inscription on a slab of hard limestone warns foreigners (non-Jews) not to enter the sacred inner precinct of the Temple Mount. According to the first-century C. E. Jewish historical Flavius Josephus, similar warnings, “some in Greek, others in Latin,” were posted “at regular intervals” along the *soreg*, the stone balustrade that bounded the sacred precinct. The partial inscription on this fragment, in Jerusalem’s Rockefeller Museum, has been reconstructed based on a more complete version, not in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. Page 60.

Jacobson, David. Sacred Geometry: Unlocking the Secret of the Temple Mount. Biblical Archaeology Review. 9/1999

A true spiritual authority challenges us with our own potential, our own vision, our own promise of glory. A true spiritual authority leaves us busy thinking our own thoughts rather than merely mouthing his. The one sure way to spot false authority in spiritual matters is the suggestion that your troubles are over and that you have arrived, that the work of your imagination is complete. A true spiritual authority leaves us with our own work to do. There is no final ending. Pg. 104. Jones, Alan. Exploring Spiritual Direction. Boston. Cowley Pub. 1999.

People will recognize us as speaking with authority only when they sense that, like Jesus, we are under divine authority ourselves, that our message is not our own, that our actual lives

stand behind the message, that our words are meant to reveal God and not ourselves, that we love others enough to give up protecting ourselves, that our real concern is God’s kingdom and not how we impress others, that we consider the community bigger than ourselves, and that we are willing to sweat blood rather than get bitter or walk away.

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. Ministering with authority. The Catholic Messenger, 2/6/03. Page 10.

"It is one thing to say with the prophet Amos, 'Let justice roll down like mighty waters,' and quite another to work out the irrigation system. Clearly there is more certainty in the recognition of wrongs than there is in the prescription for their cure." - William Sloane Coffin

The highest perfection consists not in interior favors or in great raptures or in visions, or in the spirit of prophecy, but in the bringing of our wills so closely in conformity with the will of God that, as soon as we realize that He wills anything, we desire it ourselves with all our might, and take the bitter with the sweet, knowing that to be His Majesty's will. -- Teresa of Avila

Jesus’ primary metaphor for this new consciousness was “the kingdom of God.” He is not talking about a place, or an afterlife, but a way of seeing and thinking now. The kingdom of God is the naked now—the world without human kingdoms, ethnic communities, national boundaries, or social identifications. That is about as subversive and universalist as you can get. But don’t think about that too much; it will surely change your politics and your pocketbook. Richard Rohr.

After the ‘individual’s fundament choice’ will come the common option of the mass of mankind. A day must come, he believes, when men ‘will have finally become conscious of their common unity and their intimate links with all the rest of the universe, and will hold in their hands the plenitude of their soul, to cast it freely into the divine centre’. It is then that the final option will be made, in the form of a world’s choice between revolt and worship. de Lubac, Henri. The Religion of Teilhard de Chardin. NY. Desclee Co. 1962. Pg. 113.

There is a point at which everything becomes simple and there is no longer any question of choice, because all you have staked your life on will be lost if you look back. Life’s point of no return. 54 Hammarskjold

Every choice is a renunciation. Rolheiser, Ronald. Against an Infinite Horizon. NY. Crossroad Pub. 2001. Pg. 16.

Willfulness characterizes the unharnessed human will, whereas willingness identifies the strong will of a person who is willing to go where he or she is called or led by a higher power. William May

The reign of God isn't a place; we can't think of it as a place. It's our relationship to God and how God enters deeply into our life, how God is effective in my life right now. We need only to open ourselves to God, follow the way of Jesus, and we're within God's reign, that relationship that brings to us the fullness of God's life. Bp. Thomas Gumbleton

The Kingdom of God is a dark menace to the complacency and contentment of those who flourish under the kingdoms of this world; a shining vision of release and new beginnings to the victims of the present order; and perhaps also a mocking rebuke to the programs, projects, and pride of those who hope to create a new order by themselves. Alan Lewis

21.23–32: Jesus’ authority is questioned (Mk 11.27–33; Lk 20.1–8). 23: Temple authorities challenge Jesus (cf. 9.34; 12.22–24; 19.3–9; 22.15–22,34–46). Chief priests, Gk “archiereus,” in sing. “high priest,” in pl. “chief priests,” including previous high priests and family members. In Lk 3.2 there is mention of “the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas”: Annas had been deposed by the Romans

in 15 ce and was succeeded by sons and a son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was high priest 18–36 ce. 25: Baptism of John, see 3.1–12. 26: Regard John as a prophet, see 17.12–13n. 21.28–32: Parable of the two sons. See 20.1–16. 29: Changed his mind, the first son represents those who repent. 30: But he did not go, the second son, a liar and a hypocrite, represents those who preach but do not practice (see 23.2–3). 21. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#) Pgs. 38-9.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 187-191. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Greeley, Andrew. [When Life Hurts](#). Chicago. Thomas More Press. 1988. . NOT HONORING A PROMISE: Page 51f.

Sumwalt, John E. [Forty Tellable Tales for Cycle A](#), Lima, Ohio. C.S.S. Pub. Co. Inc. 1992. WHAT COUNTS IN THE END? Pages 96-7.

Mitchell, Stephen. [The Enlightened Heart](#). NY. Harper & Row. 1989. **TRUTH. Page 37.**

Hays, Edward. [Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim](#). Easton, KS. Forest of Peace Books. 1998. PSALM OF THE RAZOR'S EDGE. Pg. 177.