

Homily for September 25, 2011 – Fr. Tim Ralston

The parable in today's Gospel is one we can all understand, especially the parents among us. A father has two sons and tells them to go work in the vineyard. The first son outright refuses, which probably leads to great frustration on the father's part. The father then goes to the second son, who agrees to go work, which must have been pleasing to the father. However, that satisfaction quickly would go away when the father realizes his son didn't follow through on his word. We can understand this feeling. We can also understand the joy experienced by the father when the first son ends up going out to work, after initially refusing. These types of things still happen frequently between parents and children.

When it comes down to it, it is the difference between words and actions. The saying goes that "Actions speak louder than words." And this is true, as evidenced in the parable. The actions of the first son ended up providing more happiness to the father than the words of the second son.

The same is true in our own lives. Our actions always say more about who we are and what we believe than our words can. Now, this doesn't mean our words aren't important, because they definitely are. But our words are empty if they how we live doesn't follow what we say.

For example, we gather every week to profess our faith in the Nicene Creed. We stand and give witness to our belief in God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and in the "one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church". We say the words every Sunday, and it's pretty easy for us to do. We've heard it and recited it enough that we have it memorized. And we're saying it here in Church, surrounded by others who are professing the same faith. This is a good thing for all of us to do.

But, what happens when we leave here after Mass. Do those words we have said make an impact on our lives? Or do we forget them as soon as our feet hit the parking lot? Do we live like those who believe in a loving, involved God by being faithful to His commands? Or do we live as practical atheists, pretending it makes no difference how we act? And do we live as those who believe that the Holy Spirit is continually guiding the Catholic Church, which was founded by Jesus Himself, by learning and following the teachings of the Church in all areas of our lives? Or do we pick and choose which teachings we follow, which ones are convenient for us?

If our actions do not correspond to the beliefs we profess, that's a problem. We are in the same situation as the first son in today's parable. We give lip service to the Father by saying "Yes, we'll do what you say," but then proceed to ignore what He has asked us to do. It is clear from the parable that we do not want to be like the first son. Once we have agreed to do the work that the Lord has given us to do, then there's only one good option for us. And that, in the words of the Nike commercials, is "Just do it." This is how we will avoid being hypocritical, as was the first son.

However, when it comes down to it, we don't really want to strive to be like the second son either, the one who originally said no, then went and did as his father had asked him. Even though he is the one who does his father's will, he is still not the ideal for us to follow. This is because of his original response, his saying no to the Father.

So, what we want is the response of the second son, who gave an enthusiastic yes to his father, combined with the actions of the first son, who went and did his father's will. That is what we should be striving after. For that is what discipleship means. Committing our lives to the Lord, and then following through by living our lives in His service. We commit and re-commit our lives to the Lord every Sunday as we profess our faith, by reciting the Creed, which we will do here in a couple of minutes. Then, after being strengthened by the Lord's own Body and Blood in the Eucharist, we will be sent forth back into the world, where we will need to follow through with our commitment.

For we know there is work to be done. And the Lord has called each of us to help with this work. Our Heavenly Father comes to each of us everyday and speaks to us saying, "Go out and work in My vineyard today." How will we respond?