



*Light and
Love in the
darkness*

CELEBRATING AT HOME LECTIO DIVINA FOR 26TH SUNDAY

Disobedient obedience & obedient disobedience (Mt 21:28-32)

This resource is presented by the Carmelites of Australia & Timor-Leste at a time when we cannot gather together as we usually do to celebrate the Eucharist. We are conscious that Christ is present not only in the Blessed Sacrament but also in the words of the Gospel and in our own hearts. Even when we are on our own we remain part of the Body of Christ.

In the room you decide to use for Lectio Divina you could have a lighted candle and the Bible. These symbols help keep us mindful of the sacredness of our time of prayer.

Lectio Divina has four main stages. The first stage is *lectio* (reading) where we read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us.

The second stage is *meditatio* (reflection) where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us.

The third stage is *oratio* (response) where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God.

The final stage of Lectio Divina is *contemplatio* (rest) where we let go not only of our own ideas, plans and meditations but also of our holy words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within us. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. This transformation will have a profound effect on the way we actually live our daily lives.

As you use this prayer know that the Carmelites will be remembering in our prayer you and all the members of our family at this time.

CELEBRATING AT HOME

LECTIO DIVINA FOR 26TH SUNDAY

Prayer

Create silence in us so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

A key to the reading

Jesus recounts a very common event in family life. One son says to the father, "I'm going!" but then does not go. Another son says, "I'm not going!" but then goes. Jesus asks his listeners to pay attention and express an opinion. In our reading let us be attentive so as to discover the precise point to which Jesus wishes to call our attention.

Read (Matthew 21:28-32)

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people, 'What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, 'My boy, you go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not go', but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man went and said the same thing to the second who answered, 'Certainly, Sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?' 'The first,' they said. 'Jesus said to them, 'I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, a pattern of true righteousness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.

Reflect

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection

Comment

The context within which Matthew places these words of Jesus (Matthew chapters 18-23)

The context of Matthew's Gospel within which this parable is found is one of tension and danger. After the Discourse on the community (Mt 18:1-35), Jesus leaves

Galilee, crosses the Jordan and begins his last journey towards Jerusalem (Mt 19:1). Long before, he had said that he was to go to Jerusalem to be apprehended and killed and that then he would rise again (Mt 16:21; 17:22-23). Now the time has come to go to the capital city and to face prison and death (Mt 20:17-19).

When he arrives in Jerusalem, Jesus becomes the subject of conflict. On the one hand the people welcome him joyfully (Mt 21:1-11). Even children acclaim him when, with a prophetic gesture, he expels the sellers from the temple and he heals the blind and the lame (Mt 21:12-15). On the other hand the priests and doctors criticize him. They ask him to tell the children to keep quiet (Mt 21:15-16). The situation is so tense, that Jesus has to spend the night outside the city (Mt 21:17; cf. Jn 11:53-54). But the following day he goes back early in the morning and, on the road to the temple, curses the fig tree, symbol of Jerusalem, a fruitless tree bearing only leaves (Mt 21:18-22). He then goes into the temple and begins to teach the people.

While he is speaking to the people, the authorities come to discuss with him. Jesus answers them one by one (Mt 21:33-22:45), the high priests and the elders (Mt 21:23), the Pharisees (Mt 21:45; 22:41), the disciples of the Pharisees and of the Herodians (Mt 22:16), the Sadducees (Mt 22:23), and the doctors of the law (Mt 22:35). Finally, Jesus denounces at length, and in harsh terms, the scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23:1-36), followed by a tragic accusation against Jerusalem, the city that will not be converted (Mt 23:37-39). It is within this context of tension and danger that Jesus tells the parable of the two sons, the subject of our meditation.

Commentary on the words of Jesus as found in Matthew 21:28-30: An example taken from family life
What is your opinion? This is a provocative question. Jesus asks his listeners to be attentive and to reply. In the context of the parable, the listeners invited to give their opinion are the high priests and elders of the people (Mt 21:23). These are the ones who, from fear of the people, would not give an answer to the question as to the origin of John the Baptist, whether he was from heaven or from earth (Mt 21:24-27). **These are the ones who** will seek a way to arrest him (Mt 21:45-46).

A man had two sons. Jesus tells the story of a father who says to one of his sons "My boy, you go and work in

the vineyard today". The young man replies, "Certainly, sir!" but then does not go. The father then says the same thing to his other son. This son replies, "I will not go!" but then goes. The listeners too are fathers of families and must have known these matters from personal experience.

Which of the two did the father's will? Jesus ends the parable by making explicit his initial question. The priests and elders answer promptly, the second! The answer came quickly because the matter concerned a familiar situation, well known and evident, one that they experienced in their own families and, most probably, practiced by them (and by all of us) when they were young. Thus, in reality, the answer was a judgment, not on the two sons in the parable, but also on themselves. By answering, the first, they were judging their own attitudes. For, in times past, they had so often told their father, "I will not go!" but then went under pressure of circumstances or because remorse led them to do what the father asked. In their reply they show themselves as if they were obedient children.

This is precisely the function or the "trap" of the parable, namely, to bring the listeners to feel involved in the story, so that using their own experience as criterion, they would come to a value judgment of the story told in the parable. This judgment will soon be used as a key to apply the parable to life. The same didactic procedure may be found also in the parable of the vineyard (Mt 21:41-46) and that of the debtors (Lk 7:40-46).

Application of the parable. I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you! Using the reply given by the priests and elders as a key, Jesus applies the parable to the sinful silence of His listeners before the message of John the Baptist. The reply they gave becomes their own condemnation. According to this sentence, it is the publicans and prostitutes, who, at first, had said no to the father but then did the will of the Father, because they had received and accepted the message of John the Baptist as coming from God. Whereas they, the priests and elders, were the ones who, at first, had said yes to the father, but had not carried out what the father had asked, because they would not accept the message of John the Baptist, not even in the face of so many who did accept it as from God.

Thus, by means of the parable, Jesus turns everything upside down: those who were considered transgressors

of the Law and therefore condemned, were in truth those who had obeyed God and tried to walk the way of justice, while those who considered themselves obedient to the Law of God, were in fact those who disobeyed God. The reason for this harsh judgment from Jesus lies in the fact that the religious authorities, priests and elders, would not believe that John the Baptist came from God. The publicans and the prostitutes, however, believed. This means that for Jesus, the contemplative outlook, the ability to recognize the active presence of God in persons and things of life, was not in the priests, not even among their leaders. Yet it was in those who were despised as sinners and unclean. It is easy to understand why these authorities decided to apprehend and kill Jesus: "when they heard these parables, the chief priests and the scribes realized He was speaking about them" (Mt 21:45-46).

Anyone who wishes to apply this parable today would probably provoke the same anger that Jesus did through his conclusion. The same thing happens today. Prostitutes, sinners, the ignorant, some women, children, lay people, workers, people of color, prisoners, homosexuals, persons with AIDS, drunkards, drug addicts, divorced persons, married clergy, heretics, atheists, unmarried mothers, the unemployed, the illiterate, the sick, that is, all those marginalized as not part of the religious circle, frequently have a sharper outlook in perceiving the way of justice than those of us who live all day in church and are part of the religious hierarchy. It is not just because a person belongs to the religious hierarchy, therefore, that he or she has an outlook that allows him or her to perceive the things of God in life.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word, you who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.