

September 27, 2026 -- 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Ezekiel 18:25-28; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32

H O M I L Y

For God, people are not divided into two categories: the good and the bad. For Him, all are His children; all are sinners, on a journey, always capable of falling again, but also always called to a new conversion, and therefore capable of a new conversion.

In the society in which Jesus lived, “sinners” were not simply people who had committed some serious offense. They constituted a social class. In fact, they were outcasts. Anyone who, for one reason or another, had strayed from the law and customs of the middle class (which consisted of the educated and virtuous—the Scribes and Pharisees) was treated as someone of a lower class. Sinners thus belonged to a well-defined social class, the same one to which the poor—in the broadest sense of the word—also belonged.

This class included all those who engaged in immoral or impure occupations: prostitutes, tax collectors (in the service of the Roman authorities), and moneylenders. It also included those who did not pay tithes to the priests and anyone who was negligent regarding the observance of the Sabbath and the rules of ritual purity. The laws and customs in this area were so complex that uneducated people were unable to understand what was expected of them. The uneducated were inevitably lawless and immoral, and they were regarded by the Pharisees as sinners.

Furthermore, it was virtually impossible to escape such a situation. Theoretically, a prostitute could be purified, but only through a very elaborate process of penance, purification, and atonement. But this cost a great deal of money, and, of course, she could not use the money she earned from her trade for this purpose... Similarly, tax collectors were required to return to everyone they had defrauded everything they had taken, plus a fifth. An uneducated person had to undergo a long process of instruction before being considered “purified.” In practical terms, being a sinner was the fate of certain people. It was believed that some were condemned to this inferior status by fate or by God. In this sense, sinners were prisoners. They were denied any form of responsibility in a society deeply concerned with social class.

What does Jesus do? He mingles with sinners and, in doing so, restores their dignity. He makes a point of associating socially with tax collectors and prostitutes. He eats with them. And as soon as they show the slightest sincere openness of heart, he tells them that their sins are forgiven. The Greek word for “forgive” means “to let go,” “to release,” “to set free.” To forgive someone is to set them free from the dominion of their past life. When God forgives, He overlooks the past of the person He forgives and removes the present and future consequences of past transgressions.

Jesus’ acts of friendship toward these people clearly revealed what was in his mind and heart. He set aside their past. He regarded them as people who no longer owed any debt to God and who therefore no longer deserved to be rejected or punished. They were forgiven.

Not only through the words of today’s Gospel, but also through his overall attitude, Jesus proclaims that anyone who says “no” to God can, with His grace, transform that “no” into a “yes ”; and that the person saying “yes” for the moment—or thinking they are—should not boast about it, for that “yes” is all the more fragile when one is arrogant.

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