

God's patience works unto repentance

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 21:28-32; (R1) Ezechiel 18:25-28; (R2) Philippians 2:1-11.

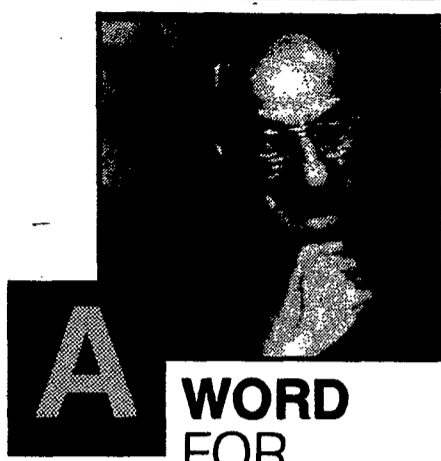
In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord said, "Let your 'yes' mean yes and your 'no' mean no." Obviously, the two lads in the Gospel parable weren't listening. One says 'yes' but does 'no,' and the other says 'no' but does 'yes.'

Then to complicate things even further, Jesus says the dishonest tax collectors and the disreputable prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God. I am sure the chief priests and the elders must have repeated Ezechiel's words, "The Lord's way is not fair!"

What was our Lord driving at?

First, that our actions speak louder than our words. We have two tongues: one in our head and one in our shoes. And the one in our shoes speaks louder and has the last word.

Dr. Mortimer Adler once said, "Life happens at the level of actions, not words." Our Lord said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father."



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

Many talkative people can be found in the church today. They are glib with words, but weak on performance. But when all is said and done, what really matters is results.

A second lesson to this parable is that people can change: a good person can become bad and vice versa.

God doesn't care about our past. "If a wicked man turns from his wickedness, he shall preserve his life." An old poem goes like this: "I wish there was some wonderful place/Called the

Land of Beginning again/Where all our mistakes and all our heart-aches/And all our poor, selfish grief,/Could be dropped, like a shabby old coat at the door,/And never put on again."

The "Land of Beginning" again is now, here on earth. The night comes when no man can work — the night is death. Until death, we have the time to change our minds and hearts — and the place to change them begins again in the confessional.

Jesus instituted this sacrament for the same reason pencils have erasers. He knew we'd make mistakes. He knew we needed second chances. He knew we can change.

Parables tell us more about God than about ourselves. In the parable it was the father who called the sons to go to work in the vineyard. God always takes the initiative when it comes to our salvation. God called Abraham and Moses. Christ called the Twelve. Mary's reported apparitions in the last two centuries are calls from heaven. God and the saints are concerned about us.

The father asked his sons to go work in the vineyard. He was rich. He could have hired servants to do this. Instead he asked his sons because

work is good for people. The used key keeps shiny. Idleness is the devil's workshop.

The father was so kind and patient. When the first son became insolent and said, "I won't," his father said nothing. God our Father is pretty patient with all of us. How often we say, "I won't go to Sunday Mass. I won't go to monthly confession. I won't forgive that nasty person. I will use artificial contraception." God keeps quiet now. Why? He hopes we will change our ways.

God's patience works unto repentance. He says, in effect, "You made a mistake. You told me off, like the first son. But don't make the terrible mistake of not changing, of postponing your conversion, your confession."

Lastly, the father said, "Go work in my vineyard today." Plan to live this day as if it were Christmas. Give such gifts today as forgiveness to enemies; tolerance to opponents; a smile to friends; good example to your children. And wrap up every gift with unconditional love.

Don't waste even a precious second today in anger, hate, jealousy or selfishness. You will harvest the seeds you sow. Today, therefore, plant only good seeds.

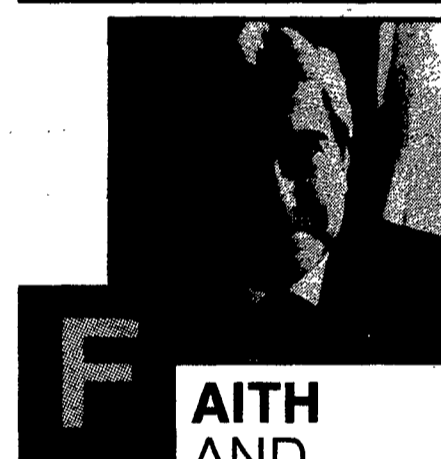
Goals for children are constantly changing

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

I set one goal for myself when my first children (boy and girl twins) were born, exactly on my 40th birthday: Let's just get them into kindergarten alive and healthy, I prayed.

As any parent can testify, kids grow up faster than we ever thought possible. Here it is almost six years later, and Abigail and Nathaniel are heading off to kindergarten, with their brother Zachery only a year behind. So now it's time to set some new goals for my maturing career as a father.

Let's see, if I can just get them ... what? Graduated from grammar school, high school, college? Married with children? Launched on successful careers? (Nate shows great promise as a switch-hitting catcher; Abby recently created the cover artwork for a new book my company is publishing; and Zack shows a definite inclination toward the field of entomology — the branch of zoology that



F AITH AND WORK

deals with insects.)

None of these goals, however, seems ambitious enough. Maybe now that I realize how much work being a parent is, I'm no longer satisfied with "alive and well." Nor would I be happy with mere "success" for my children. Now that I have gotten to know them and

realize how much potential they have, my hopes for them have gone through the stratosphere.

First I want them to be kind. My children have already shown the ability to be truly kind human beings, but they have also demonstrated that they can be mean. It is up to their mom and me to show them that the meek are blessed. "If you ever bully other kids," I warn them in jest, "I'll beat you up myself."

Another goal I have for my children is that they learn to take risks. I constantly encourage them to try new things, to not be afraid of the unfamiliar or unknown. Much to their mother's chagrin, I push them to jump a little farther, run a little faster, climb a little higher. Not that I want them to take crazy risks. (They already know that there are three things they will do only over my dead body: smoke cigarettes, ride a motorcycle, and take drugs.) But I do want them to live life to its fullest and to realize their potential.

I also want my children to be without prejudice. This is a very difficult

goal in our society. It is so easy for us to gravitate toward people who are like ourselves and to be suspicious of everyone else. One of the reasons my wife and I have chosen to live in a large city is because of the ethnic, economic and religious diversity it offers. Still, we constantly must work at creating opportunities for our children to experience that diversity in positive and relationship-producing ways.

Finally, I try to teach my kids to hunger and thirst for justice. I do not want them to be satisfied with the world as it is. I want them to realize that the many blessings and advantages they have received are gifts that must be returned a hundredfold. They must know that simple charity to those less fortunate is never enough, and that they must also be willing to fight to create structures and institutions in church and society that will ensure justice for all people.

My new goal as a father is that I live to see my children become kind, courageous, unprejudiced fighters for social justice. Is that too much to ask?

Kids' Chronicle Answer Key

1. Eden
2. Egypt
3. Jericho
4. Jerusalem
5. Israel
6. Bethlehem
7. Galilee
8. Damascus
9. Rome
10. Jerusalem

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