

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sept. 26-27, 2020, Cycle A

Unlike other parables, the one in today's Gospel does not seem to pose a difficult riddle. A father asks his two sons to go out to work in the vineyard. The first says no, but then changes his mind and goes. The second son says yes but does not follow through. It does not seem hard to answer Jesus' question, "Which of the two did his father's will?" Isn't it the one who thought better of his original answer and actually complied with his father's wishes?

Jesus' parable of the father and his two sons is designed to jar the Jewish religious leaders into conversion, so that they will practice what they preach and teach. The Pharisees and other religious cry Lord, Lord, Yes Lord, but did not always do the will of God. Earlier in Matthew's Gospel (7:21-27), Jesus warned his own disciples that merely crying out, Lord, Lord was not sufficient, we must also do the will of God – Jesus then told his disciples the parable of the person who built his house on sandy soil, and the person who built his house on solid rock foundation. What Jesus is saying, is: it is easy to Say "yes" to following him, but how difficult it is to live what He demands of us – to Act on the Word of God.

As believers of a community of faith our first "yes" came at Baptism, whether spoken of our own volition, or spoken by our parents and godparents! Our lives since have been a series of challenges to translate our baptismal "yes" into action – doing the will of God.

However, translating our yes, or "Lord, Lord" into action is very difficult, unless our "yes" is constantly reaffirmed. Constant reaffirmation of our "Yes" is accomplished on a practical level at our weekly celebration of the Liturgy. Ever wonder why the Church is so insistent of the celebration of the Eucharist every Sunday? The Church does not insist that we celebrate Mass Sunday after Sunday because celebrating Mass is a nice pious thing for us to do. No, without constantly nourishing ourselves weekly at the Eucharist, our "yes" will wither and die on the vine, and our doing the will of God will become as dry as a dry old river bed. We will have cut ourselves off from Jesus, who empowers us. At weekly Sunday Mass, our "yes" is constantly enlightened by the Word of God that is proclaimed, and nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ we share at His Table. Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic has thrown a wrench in our Sunday Eucharist assemblies. How do we nourish our "yeses" if we can't gather normally? Good question! We do what we feasibly can do. If we can't safely celebrate the Eucharist in person, we can always tune into the livestream Mass, whether from St. Matthew or from elsewhere. While not ideal, the livestream Mass does allow us to hear the Word of God being reflected upon, and at least make a spiritual connection with the Risen Lord. The habit of saying "Yes to God's will" and translating our "yes" into action requires life-long care and constant attention: - therefore, the need to celebrate the Eucharist our whole life long.

Even the celebration of the Eucharist, though, can become a mere crying out "Lord, Lord" if we become complacent in what we are praying and celebrating. For the Eucharist to re-affirm us in our "yes" that leads to doing the will of God; full, active conscious participation in the Liturgy is called for. Again, difficult to do during a pandemic! Let us re-double our efforts praying that God will hasten that day we can all gather safely celebrating what Jesus has asked us to do in memory of Him.