

*The Two sons of the Father: the listener and the doer.*

What is the cause of suffering in our life? Is it a punishment for the deeds of our forefathers or is it a punishment for our own deeds? In today's first reading - Ezekiel present before us this very question. This reading revolves around a proverb that was commonly used among the Jewish people during the time of Prof. Ezekiel. "*The parents have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge*". This means that the parents who eat unripe grapes, have passed on the resulting sour taste to their children, implying that the present generation was being unjustly punished for what their fathers did.

So why were the people of Judah complaining like this? The events of this reading took place between the first and second deportation of the people of Judah to Babylon between the years 597-587 BC. The people of Judah, enduring exile in Babylonia, interpret the proverb to mean that they are suffering exile because of the sins of their parents. They believe themselves to be innocent, and the way Yahweh treating them is unjust. This way of thinking had a serious fall out. People lost hope; they believed that they were doomed, regardless of anything that they might do. At the same time, they began to look at God as their enemy. Instead of asking what they could change, they told each other that they had no choice. Suffering was the only option available.

Moving away from the concept of collective responsibility, which was possible, when there were structures like a king, temple etc. to safeguard and control the behavior of the people, the prophets spoke about individual responsibility. The way forward is through repentance, the way out of death to life.

We often come across people who play the blame game. Things are happening in my life today because this person or that person did that. Though the situations of our life can definitely affect our life, they don't have to define us or limit us. Those who take responsibility for their lives can rise above the situations that they find themselves in. The challenge before us today is to stop making excuses and blaming others for what is happening in our lives. We are called to look at our lives honestly and turn to the Lord, taking responsibility for our lives and actions.

Our second reading is Paul's recommendations about how a Christian should live. He tells the Philippians community that he desires for them to have deep, abiding internal unity among themselves. The first step to achieving unity is to not to be motivated by selfish ambition, but to have the quality of humility and not to look down on anyone.

Today's gospel contains Jesus's response to the question about his authority raised by the elders. In his parable of the comparison of two sons: One says, he will do what his father asks, but doesn't do, while the other says he will not, but does. There are some who claim to obey the Father and observe the commandment, but in actuality they fail to do so. The religious leaders would not accept their need for repentance and rejected not only John the Baptist, but Jesus himself. At the same time, the tax-collectors and prostitutes repented and turned to God.

The question that came to my mind is, the question which will be asked to me after my death: did you do the will of the Father, or did you do your will? We may be involved in many ministries and services in the church, but the basic question to be asked is: Am I doing God's will or am I doing my own will? Which son am I? Am I like the first son, delivering big speeches and advising everyone, but when someone needs my help, I am not available? Or am I like the second son, who likes to avoid all tasks and opportunities that come my way and instead prefers sticking to only things that I want to do?

Actions are definitely more important than words. The important difference between the two sons is *the ability to change one's mind*. The first son was able to reflect on his life and what his father was asking him to do and respond accordingly. The second son's response emerges from habit. There is no reflection. Many times, in our lives, we are faced with new situations and new possibilities. We may not like what happens and then choose to act out of habit, without reflecting on it. We can reflect on what God is asking me in this new situation, discern about them and choose to embrace them.

Today, let us pray for grace to take responsibility for our lives and be doers of the word, instead of only being listeners and speakers of the word.