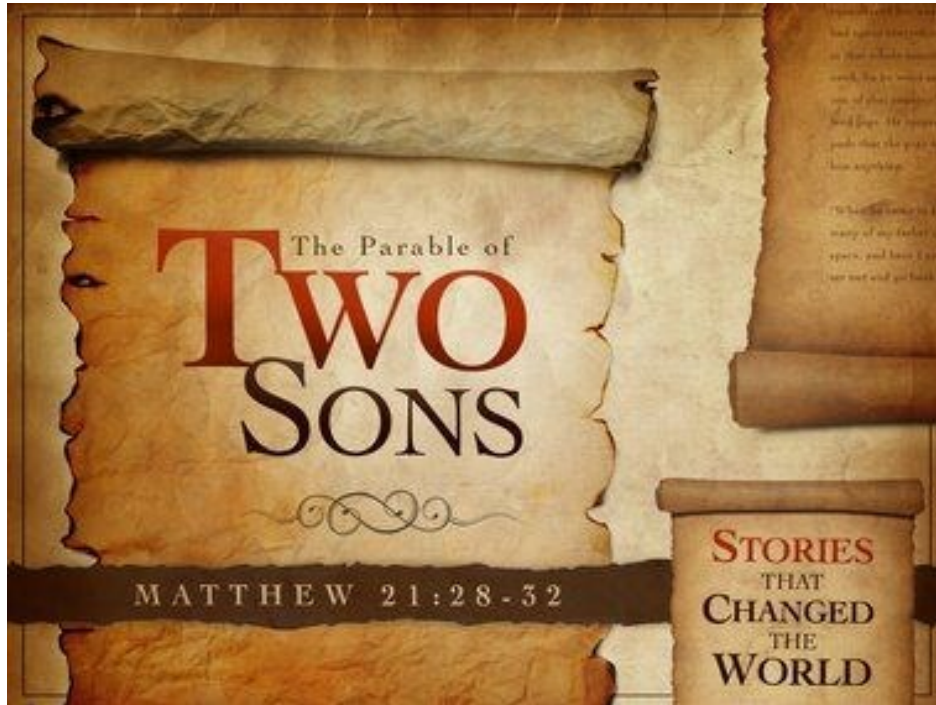


St. Teresa in her book, *Stories of Conscience*, talks about how she once became envious of the penances done by a woman she knew. St. Teresa wanted to do the same penances, but when she talked to her confessor about it, he prohibited her from doing so. There arose a serious argument within her—to follow her



friend—or to obey the confessor. She prayed about it for some time, and one day she heard Jesus saying, “My daughter, you are heading the right way. Do you see how much penance this woman does? Know that I have an even greater esteem for your obedience.”

We are constantly saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in our lives. In the gospel of today, the father asked his two sons to share his work in the vineyard. One said ‘yes’ but did not go. He professed with his lips but did not perform. The other son refused the father initially but later repented and carried out the father’s wish. He did not profess but performed. Many of us are like the son who promised to go to the vineyard but never went. We promise God never to do that again, and we end up doing the same thing again, the same sin again. We promise God to go to church, or to pray every day, or to read the bible every day, or to be part of a ministry in the Church, or to come to Mass a few minutes early. But how many of us have come true on our promises? We need to turn our promises into fulfillment and words into action.

“If a person turns away from his wickedness and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life”, says Ezekiel in the first reading of today. The Lord gives us many opportunities to repent and turn away from sins. We are in need of continual conversion. Following Jesus is not a just a matter of knowing by heart the Ten Commandments but, rather, living by the message of Christ. Jesus is not a psychiatrist but a cardiologist. He listens not to our words but to our hearts. Adam and Eve said ‘no’ to God and ever since, humanity has struggled to say a deliberate ‘yes’ to God.

Jonah said ‘no’ to a trip to Nineveh in order to call sinners to repentance. After a drastic dose of divine persuasion, Jonah grudgingly turned his ‘no’ to ‘yes.’ When called by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to freedom, Moses’ initial response was a negative one. Jeremiah was similarly disinclined when

called and commissioned to be God’s prophet. “I am too young,” he objected, “I don’t know how to speak.”

We have the example of Peter who denied his best friend and then repented . . . and Thomas who moved from doubt to belief.

Thomas Merton was orphaned at 16. He became a Communist at 20. He found Christ at 23. At 24, he became a *New York Times* reporter. At 26, he put all his possessions in a duffel bag, went to Kentucky, and became a Trappist monk—truly a moment of a resounding ‘yes’ to God.

One night, the semi-drunk navigation officer of a U.S. Navy Battleship, seeing a light in the distance, reported to the Admiral that the battleship seemed to be on a collision course with another ship. So, the Admiral sent a radio message to the oncoming ship that it should change its course 10 degrees to the south.

The reply came simply, “No. You change YOUR course 10 degrees to the south.”

After two more unsuccessful exchanges, the Admiral, now quite furious, yelled over the microphone, “Do you know that you are talking to an ADMIRAL in the UNITED STATES NAVY?”

Then, after a brief moment of silence, the even-tempered reply came back, “Sir, do you know that you are talking to the lighthouse?”

So, when God asks you to do something or change your direction in life and you wonder why, remember whom you are talking to! Say ‘yes’ and carry out His orders and avoid disaster in this life and the next.