

Last week we heard Jesus using the image of a land owner who goes out morning, noon and evening to invite workers in to his vineyard. The Lord was reminding us that God is someone who is always searching and inviting us into His Kingdom.

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. The father came to the first son and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' The son said in reply, 'I will not, ' but afterwards changed his mind and went. The father then came to the other son and gave the same order. The son said in reply, 'Yes, sir, 'but did not go. Which of the two sons did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."

Jesus was a Rabbi which means teacher and as a teacher he taught in parables 35 percent of the time. The Gospels include 33 of the Lord's parables, which were stories He told using simple everyday things, such as a woman baking bread, a man knocking on his neighbor's door, a lost sheep, a lost son.

The Lord addresses his parables sometimes to the crowds, other times to His disciples and still other times, like today, He's talking specifically to Chief Priests, Elders, the religious leaders. Jesus' purpose of His stories was to get people to reexamine how they see God and how they treat their neighbor.

On Wednesday, I was talking to a friend of mine from Vermont. She shared with me what happened over the weekend while visiting her son's family. Her grandson Mike who is in the seventh grade had saved up \$300 and decided to buy these particular brands of shoes which would cost him over \$250.

Mike told his parents about his decision, but they suggested that he might want to think about his choice. His mom and dad reminded Mike that he outgrows his shoes very quickly. Later on, Mike asked his grandmother what she thought about him buying the shoes. She simply said, “remember you already have three nice pairs of shoes.” That weekend Mike continued to talk about the reasons why he wanted those shoes and even spent time on the internet researching the brand. However, on Sunday evening Mike turned to his parents and said, “I changed my mind, I decided not going to buy those shoes”. What caused Mike to have second thoughts? Mike allowed the words of his parents and grandmother to influence his decision. Jesus’ parables are meant to influence us, to change the way we think.

Today’s parable was meant to change the hearts and minds of the religious leaders. Jesus tells them that they are like the second son who said yes God but later on were not willing to listen to God’s messengers. Jesus struggled with the religious leaders because they were closed to His words; He said, “You have eyes but you don’t see, you have ears but you don’t hear.” The Lord called them stiff necked, which means they were stubborn, obstinate and inflexible.

On the other hand, we see how eager those first Apostles were in responding to Jesus’ words. The Bible states, “as Jesus was passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Peter his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they were and fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men. They immediately left everything behind and followed Him.” In contrast to the religious leaders, Peter and Andrew were open, receptive, flexible, willing to change directions in their lives.

When I was newly ordained, a retired Priest, Father Donnelly gave me some great advice about visiting hospitals. He said, "Marty, you go to the hospital with a list of parishioners you intend to visit, don't get stuck focusing just on that list, be open to a nurse, a doctor, a family member, another patient, who might be in need of seeing a Priest." Fr. Donnelly's guidance not only helped me with my hospital visits but in life; his words reminded me not to be too rigid but be open to God's changes.

The religious leaders had said Yes to God but they were not open to listen to Jesus when He came along. However, the Tax collectors and Prostitutes' openness to the Lord moved them to change directions in their lives; they originally said no to God but later on changed their minds.

A number of years ago, I was driving through a village and noticed a store parking lot sign that read, "No U-Turns allowed." A mile up the road I noticed another store parking lot poster which read, "All U-turns welcomed." The Lord always reaches out to us with compassion, letting us know that "All U-turns are welcomed".

This week I invite each of us to examine our lives. Are there areas where we find ourselves stubborn and inflexible to God's word, if so, invite Jesus into those areas.

Let us pray: please pray after me: Lord Jesus thank you for allowing me to make U-turns in my life. May your words Lord, change my heart and mind that I might be more like you. Amen and Amen.