

HOMILY for 26th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel tells us about a story of a father & his two sons. Reflecting about that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

The farmer's son was returning from the market with the crate of chickens his father had entrusted to him, when all of a sudden the box fell & broke open. Chickens scurried off in different directions, but the determined boy walked all over the neighborhood scooping up the wayward birds and returning them to the repaired crate. Hoping he had found them all, the boy reluctantly returned home, anticipating the worst.

"Pa, the chicken got loose," the boy confessed sadly, "but I managed to find all twelve of them."

"Well done, son; you did real good," the farmer beamed. "You left with only seven!"

Anyway, making promises to our parents/someone is something we do every day. Our world would not be the same without promises. They bring us hope & help us look forward to a bright future full of excitement & possibilities. They get us make it through the current difficulties & feel victorious in the end. One of the promises that God has made to the people of God was to give them possession of the Promised Land where they could grow a fruitful harvest & live peacefully for years. That promise gave the people of God strength to endure their daily sufferings & all those years of slavery. As you can see, promises play a vital role in the survival & encouragement for the people of God.

Realizing the power of promises, this Sunday's Gospel wants to discuss with us about them. It tells us about two sons who made promises to their Father after he came to them asking for help. Here is how the Gospel says, "...There was a man who had two sons. He approached the elder one & said, 'Son, go out & work in the vineyard today.' The son replied, 'I am on my way, sir'; but he never went. Then, the man came to his second son & said the same thing. This son said in reply, 'No, I will not'; but afterward he regretted it & went..." As we just heard, the oldest son made an empty promise to his father & really did not follow through with it. He just wanted his father to think that he were a good son by promising him to do the work. But, he did not really mean it or want to do something about it. He just wanted himself to look good in front of his father by making an empty promise & doing nothing with it. I'm sure you know people who do things like that – they make promises, but do not follow through with it.

Meanwhile, the youngest son did not want to help his father & simply told him that he would not do it. He did not want to make an empty promise & then do nothing about it. But, later on, he thought it over & felt bad about it. So, he returned to his father & carried out the work that he refused to do at first. He did not want to promise something & not really mean it. He realized what he did was wrong after everything his father did to raise him & take care of him. So, he changed his mind & did what his father asked him to do. He made his father proud by his repentance & correction of his fault. I'm certain that you know people who have acted like the youngest son, who did not want to do anything to help God & others, but changed their mind about it in the end.

Like I said above, we need promises from God & people around us to give us hope & encouragement every day. Our world needs more promises to lift up the downtrodden & bring rays of sunshine to the lost in our society. If we could surround ourselves with great promises, we'd be able to find strength & courage to complete our daily duties & conquer challenges of

our lives. That's why we've made promises to people around us every day to encourage & motivate them to do something well & get the job done. We tell our children/grandchildren to behave well in certain occasions; & then we will reward them with something. A boss asks his/her workers to do a job well; & later on he/she will reward them with a pay raise. God also uses promises to encourage us to follow God's Commandments & do the right things. If we do, God will reward us with a place in Heaven after this life.

Although we want to surround ourselves with promises to give us hope & encouragement in our daily life, we need to fulfill them & make sure to follow through with it. Otherwise, those promises are simply empty words without any real meaning. Sadly, that is what we see a lot in our world these days. People simply make one promise after another without any intention of fulfilling it. We see married couples promise to love & honor each other for the rest of their lives. But, when tough time comes or they disagree with each other on something, they would break that sacred promise & go their separate ways. Children promise to do something for their families & friends. But, something comes up; & they break those promises without much regret. Every day people sign contracts & promise to do work for someone. But, when something happens, they forget that contract/promise & move on to what benefits them the most. People these days do not honor their words/promises as they are supposed to.

Imagine if God the Father promised to send His Son Jesus to save us & He did not show up, we would not have Christmas & all the joy & blessings of that special season. In fact, we would not see Easter miracle & have a chance to enter Heaven either. That is why Paul has this wise advice in today's Second Reading to help us keep our promises, "...I [Paul] beg you: ...Never act out of rivalry or conceit. Rather, let all parties think humbly of others as superior to themselves, each of you looking to others' interests rather than his own. Your attitude must be Christ's." So, Paul encourages us to act humbly like Christ & put others' interests before ours. If we can do that, we'll be able to keep our promises & make them a reality without any problem. Even if we did not make any promise to do something for someone, Jesus encouraged us to change our mind & do something for the Kingdom of Heaven like the youngest son did. That is why he praised the youngest son, tax collectors, prostitutes, & anyone who have had a change of heart & wanted to do what is right & come home to God.

My dear brothers & sisters, we make promises & look forward to the ones that God & others might have made for us. Promises give us hope & encouragement to deal with our daily challenges. If those promises do not come true for some reason, we would feel very disappointed. So, let's try to fulfill our promises & honor our words to God & others around us. More importantly, let's act like the youngest son & have a change of heart to come home to God & the Kingdom of Heaven. For that is where our heart really is.