

Lectio Divina – 26th Sunday of the Year A

Matthew's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Author is anonymous, but named as 'Matthew the tax collector' by later tradition.
- Written in scholarly 'synagogue' Greek.
- Incorporates almost the entire Gospel of Mark, plus material from Q and material unique to Matthew.
- Structured around 5 major discourses (each ends with the phrase: "When Jesus had finished...."):
 1. Prologue – chapters 1- 4 Genealogy, Nativity & Infancy
 2. 1st: 5-7 Sermon on the Mount
 3. 2nd: 10 Missionary Discourse
 4. 3rd: 13 Parable Discourse
 5. 4th: 18 Community Discourse
 6. 5th: 23-25 Apocalyptic Judgement Discourses
- May be a parallel for the 5 books of the Pentateuch - Jesus the new Moses.
- Jesus first words are 'to fulfil all righteousness'.
- A handbook for Church leaders to assist them in teaching and preaching, worship, mission and polemic.
- 2 broad categories: discourse & narrative.
- The only Gospel to explicitly mention the 'Church' – Matthew is theologian of the church.
- Initially addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience – only late in the Gospel is there openness to Gentiles.
- Names Jesus as 'Messiah' at the very beginning and throughout the Gospel.

Matthew 21:28-32 - things to notice

- Between last Sunday's Gospel and this Sunday's Gospel a lot has happened: Jesus has made his mock triumphal entry into Jerusalem and has cleansed the Temple; he has also taught and healed and engaged in the prophetic act of cursing the fig tree (BOTW). Immediately before this Gospel Jesus' authority for speaking and acting have been questioned and this episode is part of Jesus' reply.
- Notice that Jesus is having an argument with the chief priests and the elders of the people and his words are addressed to them.
- He poses a question to them in the form of a little parable about a man with two sons, and which of these actually obeyed the father (did the Father's will) – the one who said 'Yes' but didn't do anything, or the one who said 'No' but changed his mind and did what the father asked him to do.
- The priests and elders answer correctly that it was the second son who did the right thing.
- Mark O'Brien points out that the chief priests and elders see themselves as loyal to the Torah and tradition and everyone else needs to change and become like them. In their opinion, tax collectors and prostitutes had almost no chance at all of being at rights with God.
- Jesus tells them that, in fact, the very people they despise are the ones making it into the Kingdom before them! That must have shocked them deeply.
- Jesus points out that the tax collectors and prostitutes responded to the teaching of John the Baptist, but the priests and the elders didn't – and even when they saw how the tax collectors and prostitutes responded, it didn't change their minds.

Liturgical Setting for this Sunday

The First Reading is from the Prophet Ezekiel: a call to righteousness; the possibility of life through conversion; the condemnation of the righteous who turn to sin; who is just – God or Israel?

Reflection

Over the next three Sundays we will listen to three parables where Jesus, having cleansed the temple, addresses the Jerusalem priests and elders. These "parables of judgement" voice God's judgement against Israel – especially her leaders – for their rejection of Jesus.

The message, however, is also for us.

In this Sunday's parable, the message could not be simpler: *action speaks louder than words*.

The tax collectors and prostitutes acted like the first son. Initially they said no to God, but hearing John the Baptist's preaching they converted and did what pleased God.

The chief priests and elders are like the second son. They, too, heard John's preaching and saw the responses of the tax collectors and prostitutes but didn't change. They pretended acceptance of God but refused to accept John's message. It is the tax collectors and the prostitutes, therefore, who will enter the Kingdom of God before the chief priests and elders.

It is easy to say that we are going to do something to please someone. But the real honour comes in doing. If we really want to honour our God, we must find ways to do the will of God. Sometimes it won't be easy, sometimes it will put us out.

We are not called to 'police' God's mercy – to decide who is deserving of it and who is not. If we have truly heard the Word of God we will be more concerned about extending the reign of God's mercy to everyone, especially to those most despised in the world.