

1. One day, back when I was a newly ordained priest,
 - a. I got a telephone call from a parishioner.
2. He wanted to come talk to me, because he had a problem.
3. When he arrived, he had his wife and daughter in tow,
 - a. and right away I knew what the problem was.
 - b. His teenage daughter was pregnant, and was just beginning to show.
4. He told me how ashamed he was,
 - a. how angry he was,
 - b. how his daughter had brought dishonor
 - i. on his family and on herself.
5. He told me that he was bound and determined to fix things,
 - a. So he spoke to the boy's parents,
 - b. And they were willing to let the two get married,
 - c. even though they were underage.
6. I told the man that I understood his shame; I understood his anger.
 - a. But I told him that I could not marry the two of them.
 - b. he was forcing her into marriage.
 - c. And Catholic marriage cannot be based on force or fear.
 - i. It has to be a free choice.
7. He flew into a rage.
 - a. This is the way it has always been done, he said
 - b. Here he was trying to make things right for his daughter,
 - c. And I was standing in his way.
 - i. I wanted his daughter to be a *putana*, he cried,
 - ii. and with wife and daughter in tow, he left.
8. I am sure many of you are surprised by my answer to the father.
 - a. But it is true: Catholic teaching about marriage, despite “the way it has always been done” is clear:
 - i. You can't be forced into marriage.
 - ii. You can't get married because you are afraid.
 - b. Since the husband and the wife “give” the marriage to each other
 - i. Both have to make a free choice.
9. And in my opinion, neither that poor pregnant girl, frightened to death by her father, and the boy, forced into marriage by that same father, could make such a choice.
10. Most of us would agree;
 - a. And yet we all sympathize with the father's concern for being “right”
 - b. For while in the ten years since that scene took place
 - c. people's attitudes about marriage and children out of wedlock have loosened,
11. All of us still want to be “right”
 - a. That is one of the reasons why we follow rules
 - i. Whether they are mommy's rules
 - ii. Our government's laws

- iii. Or God's commandments
 - b. We want to look right in the eyes of others,
 - c. And to feel right in our own eyes.
12. And that is all well and good;
- a. But what happens when someone else is not right?
 - b. When someone does not follow those rules
 - i. Breaks those laws
 - ii. Or violates those commandments?
 - c. What happens when it is
 - i. your son who is expelled from school for fighting
 - ii. Your daughter who is pregnant
 - iii. Your boss who discriminates against you
 - iv. Your husband or wife who walks out on you
 - d. What do we, who of course are right, do then?
13. Jesus wants to know.
14. And that is why he asks the chief priests and elders of the people about those two sons;
- a. One who said no to his father,
 - i. Yet later did what he asked
 - b. And the other who said yes to his father
 - i. And did not follow through.
15. After all the chief priests and the elders of the people were the authorities;
- a. They knew the rules, wrote the laws and followed the commandments;
 - b. IF anyone should know who was right and wrong it was they.
16. And they responded rightly, that the one who said no, but did yes, he was the one who was truly right.
- a. But they were completely unprepared for what Jesus would say next;
 - i. For Jesus pointed out that, on the basis of their answer,
 - ii. People like tax collectors,
 - 1. Who in Jesus day were considered traitors because they worked for the Romans
 - iii. And prostitutes
 - 1. Who in anybody's day would be considered sinners
 - iv. Would enter God's kingdom before them;
 - 1. Because even though they said no to God's law
 - 2. When John preached, they said yes to God;
 - 3. They repented;
 - v. But the chief priests, and the elders of the people,
 - 1. Who made their living off of saying yes to God,
 - 2. When they heard John preach
 - 3. Did not.
17. This story is part a larger section in Matthew's gospel where again and again the religious authorities, those who were right, try to discredit Jesus.
- a. Because they had already decided that he was not right;

- b. A blue collar worker from the hills of Galilee,
 - c. Friend of fishermen and of women of questionable morals
 - d. It was even said his mother conceived HIM out of wedlock,
 - e. And here he was wandering around claiming to be a rabbi
 - f. Rather than working to support her.
 - g. No Jesus was wrong, never more so than at this moment; for how could tax collectors and sinners who were clearly wrong, get into heaven simply by repenting, when they who were right had followed the law their entire lives?
18. Jesus sought to answer that through his parables; including today's parable of the two sons.
- a. However we have heard them so often that for us they have lost their force.
 - b. So let me tell one; one I heard recently.
19. A young man, a member of a conservative Jewish congregation, sought to marry a young woman from an Orthodox Jewish group. The Girl's family disowned her because she was marrying a man who was not right.
20. Later, the marriage ended in divorce. The man's Rabbi supported the divorce, but the young man's family, shamed by the end of the marriage, disowned him. He later died broken and drunk in the gutter.
21. On the day of the last judgment, there before the messiah, enthroned in Glory, stand the young man's rabbi and his father. At their feet lay the broken son.
22. "Who is to blame for this young man's sorry fate?" demands the messiah.
23. The father speaks first, "Not I, for I was only following the rabbi's command!"
24. Then the Rabbi speaks, " Not I, for I was only following what it says in the Law"
25. Then it is the Messiah's turn. He says, "The Father is right. The Rabbi is right. The Law is right.
- a. But I have come not for those who are right.
 - b. I have come for those who are not right."
26. And he gathers up the son in his arms and takes him into the kingdom.
27. I have come for those who are not right;
- a. For tax collectors and prostitutes
 - b. For pregnant daughters and angry fathers
 - c. For the unrighteous and the self-righteous
28. IT is why in today's second reading the author says that Jesus became a slave
- a. Because only by becoming someone who is not right
 - i. Could he reach those who are not right
29. IT is why in the first reading, Ezekiel says that everyone is responsible for themselves before God
- a. Because only by insisting on personal responsibility
 - b. could Ezekiel keep people from hiding behind their law and their rabbis and repent.
30. It is why to be God's people according to Jesus
- a. Begins with recognizing that we aren't; at least not really;
 - b. that we are wrong;
 - c. that we are sinners

- d. And that before we even think we can judge others,
 - i. We need to take a good hard look at ourselves.
 - e. Lest one day we are shocked to find ourselves last in a long line of all the wrong kind of people, getting into the kingdom ahead of us.
31. Sometimes that conversion, that repentance happens easily
- a. Other times we have to be shocked into it.
32. You are probably wondering what happened with that pregnant girl.
- a. For months I did not know.
 - b. The father and the family stopped coming to mass
 - c. Or at least, my mass.
33. Almost a year later, the father appeared at my doorstep.
- a. Wife, daughter and new grandson in tow.
34. He wanted to arrange for the baby's baptism
- a. And he wanted to let me know
 - b. That the father of the baby was, in his words,
 - c. a complete "schmuck".
 - d. He was so glad that his daughter was not saddled with him.
35. It was hard for him not to follow the rules, the laws and the customs he had been raised with; he said, but he was so glad he hadn't.
- a. According to them, he was wrong,
 - b. But in the way he had treated his daughter he knew he wasn't.
36. And somehow, he thought God would agree.
- a. Certainly Jesus would have.
 - b. And hopefully, so would we.