

HOMILY

The Twenty-Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

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Davison, Michigan

Most of us do not have a problem with outright disobedience. What we have is a problem of motivation. We're law-abiding but, for the most part, we are passive. Our sins are generally ones of omission. We're like a young man that Jesus told about who had good intentions. The problem was putting those good intentions into action.

You remember the story. A father had two sons. One day he came to the older boy and said, "Son, I want you to go to work in the vineyard today." He responded quickly, "I will not!" But afterwards the son changed his mind and went. The father also went to his other son. This son was not nearly as rebellious as his brother; he was more like many of us. "Son, I want you to work in the vineyard today." The boy's response was prompt and sincere. "Sure, Pop, I'll be happy to," but the day passed and this son never went out and worked in the vineyard.

Jesus then asked a question: "Which did the will of the father—the one who said he would not go, but did, or the one who said he would go, but never got around to it?" Which did the will of the father? The answer is obvious. The first—the one who said he would not go but did.

This is an important parable for us because we are those who have said, "Yes, Father, I will go." There was a time when we were baptized and we vowed that we would walk with the Lord. There was a time when we were confirmed and took vows of Church membership, to uphold the Church with our prayers, our attendance, our gifts, and our service. "Yes, Father, I will go." We are those who have said we would go and that is good. The question: Have we gone?

Writer Elizabeth Sherrill tells of visiting the ice-skating rink at Rockefeller Center in New York City a few years ago. Dozens of people skated around the rink, but in the center of the rink was a lovely blond woman in an attractive skater's outfit. The woman was stretching and posing, posing and stretching.

Elizabeth waited expectantly for this lovely woman to finish with her posing and begin skating, but she never did. On other visits to the rink, Elizabeth again saw this woman. She was always dressed like a professional skater, she spent lots of time doing skater's poses, but she never skated. Not once did she take a turn around the rink. She was all appearance and no substance.

For many of us, that hits too close to home. We may look like followers of Jesus. We may even talk like followers of Jesus. But deep in our hearts, we know it's only stretching and posing, posing and stretching.

Good intentions. Isn't it interesting how easy it is to put off doing the things we ought to do? Some of us even put off things we want to do.

Ann Wells, in an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, told about the preparations for her sister's funeral. Her brother-in-law handed Ann a lovely box in which lay a gorgeous silk and lace nightgown. It had never been worn, never even removed from the box. The brother-in-law explained to Ann that her sister had bought the nightgown many years ago and was saving it for a special occasion. But the special occasion never seemed to come, so this exquisite gown had gone unused. And now Ann's sister was dead, and she would never have the opportunity to wear it. The brother-in-law admonished Ann to never save anything for a special occasion because everything is a special occasion. Ann took his words to heart. She says in her article, "I'm not saving anything; we use our good china and crystal for every special event such as losing a pound, getting the sink unstopped, the first camellia.... And every morning when I open my eyes I tell myself that it is special." A good cure for unrealized intentions.

Dale Carnegie said that one of the most tragic characteristics of human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today. Good intentions.

May I ask you a question? If you knew that you only had a very short time to live, what changes would you make in your life? Are there promises you have made that you have not kept? Are there good intentions that you have not carried out? The sad truth of life is that we don't have much time. If you and I are going to be all that God has called us to be, we need to begin now. If we are going to do the things God has called us to do, we will need to do them now.

The great Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, once told a story of a flock of geese that was starting to head south to escape the blast of wintry winds. The first night they landed in a farmer's yard and filled themselves with corn. The next morning they flew on. All, that is, except one. "The corn is good," this big goose said, "so I will stay and enjoy it another day." The next morning he decided to wait still another day and another after that, enjoying the delicious food. Pretty soon he had developed a habit. "Tomorrow I will fly south," he said. Then came the inevitable day when the winds of winter were so severe that waiting longer would mean death in the frozen wastes. So he stretched his wings and waddled across the barnyard, picking up speed as he went. But, alas, he was too fat to fly. He had waited too long.

"Yes, Father, I will go." We are those who have said we would go. The question is: Have we gone? Is Jesus Christ Lord of our lives? Are we having an impact on those around us?

This month, we have passed the seven-year anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Center. Among the thousands of victims of that attack was Father Mychal F. Judge, the fire department chaplain who, while ministering to the fire fighters working at Ground Zero, was killed by falling debris from the Towers. In Father Mychal's pocket was this prayer that he always carried with him:

*"Lord, take me where You want me to go;
Let me meet who You want me to meet;
Tell me what You want me to say, and
Keep me out of Your way."*

Father Mychal was a man of commitment. He understood that the vows he took before God were not a trivial matter. He is one who said, "I'll go," and he went.

