

## Homily for Sunday, September 27, 2026

I find the word “integrity” to be one of the most challenging words to live up to. The challenge is to *integrate* my words with my actions so that they are one. A person of integrity doesn’t give mixed messages by saying one thing and doing another. A person of integrity backs up their words with actions. They keep their word. They don’t just “talk the talk” but more importantly they “walk the walk”.



I think Jesus was speaking about integrity when he said, ***“All you need to say is ‘Yes’ if you mean yes, and ‘No’ if you mean no; anything beyond that comes from the evil one”*** (Mt. 5:37). And in another place in Matthew’s gospel he said, ***“Not everyone who says, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven”*** (Mt. 7:23).

In other words talk is cheap. But talk followed up by actions is not cheap but has credibility and power. The two hottest sins for Jesus were hypocrisy and greed. In comparison, everything else, including sexual sins, were way down the list. Hypocrites were anything but people of integrity. Their outer actions said, “Look how holy I am,” but their hearts were far from love of God and even farther from love of neighbour.

Here’s a strange twist for me as I read and try to apply this gospel to my own life. Neither of the two sons mentioned in Jesus’ parable falls into the category of being a person of integrity. Neither son keeps his word. The ideal son, the son who we should aspire to be like, would be the one who agreed to work in the field and actually showed up and worked. That person is not mentioned in Jesus’ parable. The other scenario, also not mentioned, would be the son who was totally up front with his father by telling him that he has no intention of going to work in his father’s vineyard and actually keeps his word and doesn’t show up for work. There would have been no deception in his intention, and the father would have known exactly where he stood with that son. In a sense he would be a person of integrity because his words would have matched his actions. But that son is not mentioned either in the parable we just heard.

What we have instead, in today’s parable, are two sons, neither of whom we could say are men of integrity. One says, “Yes, I’ll go work in the field” but doesn’t show up, while the other says, “I won’t go” but does show up for work. In neither of these cases are their

words integrated with their actions. The poor father is caught in the middle desperately trying to get his crop in.

*Integrity*, as noble as it is, may not be the whole story. *Justice*, as noble as it is, may not be the whole story, either. God's mercy, patience, and generosity are always at play. Thank goodness. You might remember last Sunday's gospel where those that worked only one hour in the vineyard were generously rewarded a full day's wages just like those who worked the whole day. It didn't seem just, but God's mercy and generosity prevailed and everyone got the maximum—a full day's wages. Justice--everyone getting what they deserve—can, in the end, feel harsh and cold when it's not tempered with mercy. Similarly, integrity—holding people to their words every time they open their mouths—can also feel harsh and cold.

God, like the father who owns the vineyard, leaves lots of room for His sons and daughters to change their minds. Not all politicians are flip-floppers. Some, thank goodness, change their position because they opened themselves to greater insights than they had before. They may have said “No” initially but then had a change of heart. And, in time, their “no” became a resounding “yes.”

The question on the floor, in the parable is not, “Which son showed the most integrity?” If that was the primary question, that answer would be, “Neither of them, since neither of them did what they said they would do.” The more important question in the parable that Jesus wants us to ponder is, ***“Which of the two did the will of his father?”***

That's speaks to me about the importance for each of us, and collectively as Church, to always ask ourselves, “What is the will of God?” We may think we are following the will of God with our many words. But with further discernment, we realize we weren't doing so and need to change course. That's not simply called “the prerogative to change one's minds.” It's really called conversion. What patience the father in the story had with his two sons! What patience God must have with us!

There are no perfect sons in the parable, that's why Jesus didn't mention them. There are no sons/daughters, in the world, who say “Yes” and mean only “yes.” There are no sons/daughters, in the world, who say “No” and mean only “no.” We all, like the sons in the parable, do things for mixed motives. And that's O.K. That's the way God has chosen to love us. None of us are men or women of perfect integrity, only people try to be so. The good news, if we fail to show up at work in the Lord's vineyard, as we promised we would, is that the covenant with God is never broken. God waits patiently for another work day to begin. The important thing is to keep discerning the will of God, the God of mercy, the God of second chances. Here's another rendition of that parable with a slightly different twist.

***A king had two servants. He told the first servant to do something. The servant did it and was promoted. He told the second servant to do something. The servant did not do it and was fired. The servant who was promoted lived very, very well in the king's service and continued to obey the king and be promoted. One day, however, his thoughts turned to the***

*servant who had disobeyed the king and been fired. So, he went to visit him. He arrived at the house where the man used to live, but he was no longer there. A neighbour said that he had sold the house and moved to a much smaller one. When the first servant arrived at the place where the second servant now lived, he realized that “house” was too kind a word. It was a hovel. The first servant knocked on the door, and a voice said, “Come in.” The second servant was sitting on a dirt floor eating a very thin soup. The servant who had been promoted smiled. “If you had learned to obey the king, you would not have to eat thin soup,” he said. The servant who had been fired said, “If you had learned how to eat thin soup, you would not have to obey the king!”*

There is only one king worth obeying, the king Jesus was obedient to, even to the point of death. Jesus ate his share of thin soup, talked the talk and—more importantly—walked the walk. *Let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus.* (Phil. 2:5)

*Fr. Phil*