

## **Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Being away on holidays gives us the chance to experience new things. Experiencing things new broadens our understanding and cannot help but change our minds about how we see things. My time in Alice Springs gave me a number of opportunities to experience things new and to change my mind about how I understood things. For the first time I had a meal with an aboriginal elder. I saw a glimpse of life at Santa Theresa. I experienced the hospitality of the priest who are ministering to the communities around Alice Springs.

Today's readings have a lot to say about changing our minds and our way of living. In our first reading God uses the Prophet Ezekiel to respond to the charges that he is unjust in the way that he treats those who have changed their way of living. "When the upright man renounces his integrity to commit sin and dies because of this, he dies because of the evil that he himself has committed." But God says that it can go the other way too, and this is what he lovingly desires. "When the sinner renounces his sin to become law abiding and honest, he deserves to live. He has chosen to renounce all his previous sins; he shall certainly live; he shall not die."

Jesus was often in trouble with the Jewish leaders because of the way that he reached out to those they had labelled sinners. But many of these people were the ones who changed their way of living because they heard John the Baptist's call to repentance and the invitation that Jesus made to follow his way of living. Those in leadership were the slowest to respond.

To make the contrast between the response of the so-called sinners and the response of the Jewish leaders Jesus tells the parable found in today's Gospel. In his wonderful teaching style, he asks the chief priests and the elders to tell him which of the two sons in the parable was doing the father's will. They could only say that it was the one who had first said that he would not go out and work in the vineyard but had changed his mind and went, that was doing the will of his father. The Jewish leaders were like the other son who, although he said yes to his father's request, did not go to the vineyard. Jesus challenges those leaders to recall that they neither responded to John the Baptist nor to him, while the people that they despised, the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. The tax collectors and prostitutes were despised by the self-righteous ones mainly because of their service to the occupying Romans. It was like the pot calling the kettle black.

There is always a danger that when we listen to these stories we can think of them as only applying to the people of Jesus' day. We all need to ask what we can draw from this. Perhaps the first thing that comes to mind is that we can easily become critical of others while overlooking our own weaknesses. We can easily dismiss anyone who chooses to live with a different set of values than ours.

The call to be people who can change our minds about things is never easy. It is one thing to be forced by modern technology to learn a different way of doing things. But when it comes to having a different opinion about something important that can be much more difficult. We rightly want to hold onto the good things that we have learnt. We rightly want to defend the values that we have grown up with, values that have formed us well into followers of Jesus. Yet we know that we have to apply those values now in a whole lot of new situations that we could not have anticipated.

Today's reading from St. Paul to the Philippians may help us to know why we do what we do. It is the life of Christ that has been planted deep within us that empowers us to live like Christ. St. Paul challenges to live that life generously with others in mind. "There

must be no competition among you, no conceit; but everybody is to be self-effacing. Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of their own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead." St. Paul's advice directs our gaze towards Jesus, who is the one we are called to follow. "In your mind you must be the same as Christ Jesus." Paul then goes on to recite that wonderful hymn that describes how Jesus took on our humanity, became one like us so that he could raise us up with him. Today we join all of creation and acclaim Jesus as Lord.