

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, A – September 30, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 900 words

We have acted like both of the sons in today's gospel, at different times in our lives: sometimes we have known the will of God but initially refused to do it; other times we have decided to do God's will but then not followed through with action. The gospel makes it clear which of the two situations is preferred: namely, that of the son who, in the end, does his father's will, even though he delayed. But we know that neither situation is ideal. In the second reading, St. Paul told us to have the same attitude as Christ, who was "obedient to the point of death"; that is, we should strive to do the will of God always, not refusing, not dithering, not delaying, not saying "yes" but then doing otherwise. There is a little of both of the sons in us, but we are called to become like The Son – the son of God, Christ the Lord.

How do we know God's will? A lot of people needlessly complicate things in this area. For example, some idealize the will of God, as if it were sort of big and abstract and only having to do with matters of major import. The day-to-day, the "small stuff", doesn't really have anything to do with God's will, at least in their ordinary way of thinking. Others fret about it to the point of scrupulosity, in each and every detail of their lives. The proper approach, as is often the case, lies somewhere in the middle of those two extremes. God is in the fine details, but he's also in the big decisions. He is our all, and needs to be our all in how we live.

So we are called to be not like either of the sons in the gospel, but like The Son, obedient to the will of God even to the point of death. Thus, we return to our question: How do we know what God wants? For most of our day-to-day living the answer lies in two major areas: fidelity to our state in life or vocation, and fidelity to the moral law. Am I doing what I need to do as a husband or wife; as a single person; as a priest or religious? Am I doing what I need to do and should be doing as a worker in my job or as someone with authority? Then, am I doing all these things in harmony with the moral law, which God has revealed to us and which we also know from nature and reason?

In each of these two areas, the will of God is usually fairly cut and dry. We are here at Mass, the gospel has already been read, so God's will for me is to preach. When you go home, God's will might be for someone to cook dinner and feed the family. The moral element enters into my situation, with the obligation to preach the truth. (Charity also enters in, with the idea of not preaching too long.) The moral element enters into that family situation, with the obligation to prepare a nourishing meal. And so forth, in a million other situations in daily living. It's cut and dry. But if only life were always this simple!

Indeed, there are times when we have to make choices not between good and evil, where the choice is clear, but between two goods, where the choice is not so clear. This often happens in matters of vocational discernment. It also happens in questions involving the balance of home life with work demands. In so many areas of our lives, things are more "gray" than "black and white". How, then, do we discern the will of God in those circumstances?

This is where our life of prayer especially enters into the mix. In our daily prayer we take these questions to the Lord and ask him to guide us. And it's not as if the Archangel Gabriel appears to us with the answer, or that we have a vision of what we must do! Rather, we look for the movement of our heart; we look for where we have that peace that comes from the Lord. The answer here, I think, has to do again with what St. Paul said in the second reading: "Have in you the same *attitude* that is in Christ Jesus". Christ's heart was totally attuned to the will of the Father; that is the goal for us as well. But that "attuning of hearts" only comes about when we pray and are attentive to how the Lord is leading us. How relevant and how beautiful is the

traditional prayer: “Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine” – it is a prayer we could say several times daily!

Our goal is to become not like either of those two sons – which is how we tend to be now – but like The Son, who was obedient unto death. It involves fidelity: fidelity in our vocation or state of life, and fidelity to the moral law. But it also involves intimacy with Christ in prayer, attuning ourselves to him – seeking the peace that only he can give. Let us take these matters to prayer this week, striving to have the same attitude that was in Jesus: a heart that is obedient and always attuned to will of God.