

## Conversion

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Mt 21:28-32  
Ave Maria Catholic Church, October 1, 2023 - Fr. David M Vidal

God questions us in the first reading, (Ez 18:25-28): *“Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?”* Then, through the prophet, God tells us that we are led towards misery if we commit iniquity. But if we turn from sin and do what is right, we truly live.

In this brief passage of the prophet Ezekiel, we are called to experience the grace of conversion by turning away from evil and doing what is right before God.

Conversion is a supernatural act that we cannot accomplish without God’s grace. Conversion can be compared to a re-birth. This is true because after sin, and most particularly after mortal sin, death enters into our lives. After experiencing death, in order to live, we must be born again! But is it possible to be born again?

That was Nicodemus’ question to Jesus: *“How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely, he cannot reenter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?”* (John 3, 4).

Jesus answers Nicodemus by explaining what God can do for us: *“Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit . . . Do not be amazed that I told you, ‘you must be born from above,’”* (John 3, 5.7).

To be born again is possible, conversion is possible, and God makes it possible for us. This is a tremendous gift!

To be born again, we need to uproot the origin of evil from our souls and start a new life. *Conversion* is the transition from the state of sin to the state of grace, either by baptism or, in the case of those who have lost their baptismal innocence, by contrition and sacramental absolution.

Conversion implies a new perception of things. In the state of sin, everything is upside down. God, who must be the first, is the last. The last in my heart, the last in my thoughts, and the last in my actions. Spiritual things are left behind, too, because when we turn away from God, we start giving priority to worldly things.

In this state of sin, our relationship with people is also upside down because those who were created in the *image and likeness of God* are perceived as simple *objects* that can be used in any way whatsoever.

This “turning away” from God (“aversion from God”) leads to “perversion.” Saint Augustine understands the term “perversion” as an act of “turning in the wrong direction.” And the punishment is in the very act: when we turn away from God, we become miserable.

When we proudly turn our back on our natural superior, who is God, then inferior things take control of us. Then, instead of enjoying our freedom in God, we become slaves of inferior things.

The only remedy for this situation is to “convert” and “revert,” that is, to turn around and return to our original relationship with God.

Now, conversion is *more than simply faith, good desires, and words*. Luther failed when he tried to explain justification merely by faith in Christ without works and without love.

In the Gospel of St Matthew, 7, Jesus teaches us that *“Not everyone who says . . . ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”*

And what does it mean to do God’s will? The Gospel of this Sunday’s liturgy (Mt 21:28-32) poses this very question:

*“What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ He said in reply, ‘I will not,’ but afterwards changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, ‘Yes, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did his father’s will?”*

Conversion means to turn towards God and love Him with the whole mind, heart, and soul. And love is shown with works rather than with desires and words. Conversion is not simply a matter of nice intentions and words.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation calls for a final action, which is called satisfaction. The need for satisfaction helps us to understand what true conversion means.

St John Paul II explains that “satisfaction (or what we also know as penance) . . . crowns the sacramental sign of the sacrament of reconciliation. And he asks: *“What is the meaning of this satisfaction?”* And he answers: *“Certainly it is not a price that one pays for the sin absolved and for the forgiveness obtained: No human price can match what is obtained, which is the fruit of Christ’s precious blood.”*

St John Paul II concludes that satisfaction is *“the sign of the personal commitment that the Christian has made to God in the sacrament to begin a new life and therefore they should not be reduced to mere formulas to be recited, but should consist of acts of worship, charity, mercy or reparation.”*

Satisfaction is not a formula that we recite. Satisfaction requires a personal commitment. The commitment of the first son of the parable, who ultimately did what the father asked him to do. That is the commitment that the second son did not have. The second son was happy with his answer, "*Yes sir,*" and he thought that was sufficient! But if we pay attention to the parable's conclusion, we will see that "it was not enough."

Let us ask for the grace of conversion. Conversion is needed every day. Conversion is an ongoing exercise. We must turn towards God daily and leave behind those things that separate us from his love.

May we change our hearts and produce fruits of conversion. Amen.