

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, 25/9/2011

Matthew 21:23-32

For months we have been looking in Matthew's Gospel for the Gospel reading for the Sundays.

This has meant that we have been looking at the Jesus' teachings to us in different ways.

All this time Jesus is shown to be carrying out his work of teaching, healing and saving.

It is this work that the chief priests are challenging "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

Jesus answers with a question concerning the authority behind John the Baptist's work and teaching.

In answering the chief priests' question with another question, Jesus is not simply trying to win points from this round of attacks on Jesus by the Jewish hierarchy.

Jesus already has his face turned towards Jerusalem to embrace his saving actions of suffering, death and resurrection.

Jesus is not trying to win points; rather he is teaching that authority is not based solely on status and succession.

Nor is the person simply the mouthpiece of God.

This would make the person less human for being so.

Jesus is implying that a person must be in a relationship with God to be doing God's will.

Paul writes of Jesus, who is God in the flesh, or God with us, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross."

Jesus set aside his divinity and his divine authority to teach and heal as another human being among human beings.

As we look at Jesus' life as shown in the Gospels we have an example of a life that is wholly in relationship with God.

In answering the priest's question Jesus is not interested in human hierarchy where diplomas and degrees, or employment position, social standing or ancestry matter.

They are asking him to show them his credentials.

He answers them in a parable suggesting that the only credentials that he needed were the works themselves.

He offers us the story of two sons whose expression of willingness or unwillingness to work in the vineyard is reversed in practice.

This gives the contrast of saying versus doing of God's will.

If we are to be a people who do the will of God, then we need to be a people who are transformed, forgiven and renewed.

God expects us to live in a way that reflects God's love, using Jesus as a living example of doing God's will.

We are the people of God who are meant to be transformed by all that Jesus has done for us and by all that God continues to do for us in our lives.

We are to go and work in the vineyard, as transformed human beings who are in Christ and who are enabled to do God's will.