



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25–OCTOBER 1

TIME AFTER PENTECOST — LECTIONARY 26

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

A reading from Ezekiel.

¹The word of the LORD came to me:

²What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel,
“The parents have eaten sour grapes,
and the children’s teeth are set on edge”?

³As I live, says the Lord GOD,
this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel.

⁴Know that all lives are mine;
the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine:
it is only the person who sins that shall die.

²⁵Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is unfair.”
Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair?
Is it not your ways that are unfair?

²⁶When the righteous turn away from their righteousness
and commit iniquity,
they shall die for it;
for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die.

²⁷Again,
when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed
and do what is lawful and right,
they shall save their life.

²⁸Because they considered
and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed,
they shall surely live; they shall not die.

²⁹Yet the house of Israel says, “The way of the Lord is unfair.”
O house of Israel, are my ways unfair?
Is it not your ways that are unfair?

³⁰Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel,
all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD.
Repent and turn from all your transgressions;
otherwise iniquity will be your ruin.

FIRST READING *Ezekiel = eh-ZEE-kee-el*

The people of Ezekiel’s day were complaining that God unfairly punishes children for the sins of their forebears. In this text God aims to help the prophet set the record straight. The bottom line is that each person is accountable for his or her actions; that God desires the death of no one; and that people should “turn, then, and live.” This text demands a particularly deliberate reading. Read slowly and with a sense of divine authority and compassion.

³¹Cast away from you
all the transgressions that you have committed against me,
and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!
Why will you die, O house of Israel?
³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD.
Turn, then, and live.

The word of the Lord. *or* Word of God, word of life.

PSALMODY: Psalm 25:1-9

SECOND READING: Philippians 2:1-13

A reading from Philippians.

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ,
any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit,
any compassion and sympathy,

²make my joy complete:
be of the same mind, having the same love,
being in full accord and of one mind.

³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,
but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests,
but to the interests of others.

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ▶

SECOND READING *Philippians = fih-LIP-ee-unz*

This is Paul's heartfelt pastoral encouragement for the people. "Be of the same mind"—let Christ's thoughts, Christ's attitude, be your own. The central portion of the text is an ancient poem or hymn in praise of the Lord Jesus. It is extraordinarily beautiful. Take adequate time! Help the hearer feel Paul's genuine care and concern for those to whom he was writing. Care about the people in the pew, and help them to hear your concern.

¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me,
not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence,
work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

¹³for it is God who is at work in you,
enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The word of the Lord. *or* Word of God, word of life.

GOSPEL: Matthew 21:23-32

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

²³When Jesus entered the temple,
the chief priests and the elders of the people
came to him as he was teaching, and said,
“By what authority are you doing these things,
and who gave you this authority?”

²⁴Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question;
if you tell me the answer,
then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.

²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?”
And they argued with one another,
“If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us,
‘Why then did you not believe him?’

²⁶But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd;
for all regard John as a prophet.”

²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.”

And he said to them,
“Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸“What do you think? A man had two sons;
he went to the first and said,
‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’

²⁹He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰The father went to the second and said the same;
and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go.

³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?”

They said, “The first.”

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you,
the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God
ahead of you.

³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness
and you did not believe him,
but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him;
and even after you saw it,
you did not change your minds and believe him.”

The gospel of the Lord.

GOSPEL

This highly animated account (including Jesus’ sly reply to the challenge of the elders; their huddled conclave; and the parable of the bad boys) cuts to the quick in verse 31. Work every angle. A lively reading will help the assembly hear that our Lord is deadly serious.