

**Reflection on the Gospel- 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A
(Matthew 21:28-32)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

What does one do with passive-resistant behaviour? This is a question that most parents, teachers, employers and leaders of organizations have to confront at some time because there are people in every walk of life who make an art form of saying yes and failing to follow through with action. They can seriously undermine the most worthy of projects or people. We meet them in today's gospel.

And what do we do with the slow starters, those who take time to come on board? We also meet them in today's gospel. Changing one's mind is not greatly valued in our society. It is seen as a sign of weakness. For evidence of this, one has only to listen to the taunts in the parliament when one of our political leaders changes course in the light of new information. I suggest that changing one's mind can be an act of great courage and humility, even heroism. This is particularly so if it involves abandoning a self-serving direction for the sake of justice or compassion or the 'common good'. Voluntary changes in behaviour come invariably from a change of heart, from the change of heart called for in the gospels. Stories abound of those who change course and make of their whole life, retrospectively, what they opt for as their future. There are also sad stories of those who recognise the need to change behaviour patterns but refuse the necessary help for fear of a loss of face.

Jesus addresses most of his parables to the disciples. In this instance the chief priests and Jewish elders are his audience. Earlier in the chapter, this same audience is allied against Jesus (21:15). They are angered by the 'amazing things' he does and by the public recognition he receives from the children in the temple. The parable is part of his response to these temple authorities. Like the second son, they profess to do the will of God, but their actions belie their words. Jesus spells out the meaning of the parable as it relates to the disjunction between what they say and what they do. They rejected the prophet John who came to them 'in the way of righteousness'. The tax collectors and prostitutes, 'sinners' from the perspective of the authorities, accepted John's message, albeit belatedly like the first son, and are making their way into God's empire 'before' the guardians of the religious institutions. Today's parable invites us to be who we are, to bring our actions into line with what we profess as Christian disciples.