

**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 many of us 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. Such people can seriously undermine the most worthy of projects or plans. We meet them in today's gospel. And what do we make of the slow starters, those who take time to come on board? We see them in today's gospel as well. 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 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".

Jesus addresses most of his parables to the disciples. In this instance, however, his audience comprises the chief priests and Jewish elders who have challenged his authority. 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, the temple authorities 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 have 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.

Voluntary changes in behaviour often come from a change of heart, from the "metanoia" of the gospel. There are some few who change course and make of their whole life, retrospectively, what they opt for as their future. Blessed Oscar Romero, former archbishop of San Salvador, for example, was initially slow to speak out against his government's suppression of basic human rights. He knew the cost of opposing the authorities. On March 23, 1980, he called on the soldiers, as Christians, to stop carrying out the government's repressive orders. On the following day, he was assassinated. There is always a cost in the pursuit of justice, generally less dramatic than the cost to Romero. Today's parable invites us to bring our actions into line with what we profess as Christian disciples, whatever the cost.