26ᵗʰ Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski
September 27, 2020

Mary and I have three children, the youngest of whom, Mark, is featured in today's Gospel. Yes; you heard me right. Our son, Mark, is the modern incarnation of the first son in the parable. During Mark's teenage years, whenever I would ask him to do some task, he would almost always tell me "NO!" I could never handle his response without getting EXTREMELY agitated. I felt that no one should talk like that to his parent, particularly me because I'm the Dad!!!! But, fortunately, I have a very savvy wife who, as a teacher, understood the teenage mind better than this accountant. So confronted with that same situation when Mark would respond with a "NO," Mary would simply say "Thank you!" and, lo and behold, Mark, with a smile on his face, would do as requested. I came to realize that Mark simply enjoyed seeing me get needlessly upset. It took Mom to turn his "NO" into a "YES."

That's the message in today's Gospel.

When we are able to admit our faults, when we can own-up to our mistakes, we are not submitting to defeat and failure; rather, we're taking the first step toward healing and success. The perfect son, the one who says "YES" and then ALWAYS does the will of the Father, doesn't exist; we're all human.

Throughout the Old Testament, since the time of Adam and Eve, who said the first "NO" to God, we humans have been saying "NO." **But that's why Jesus came into the world: To turn our "NO" into "YES!"** Even in the New Testament, there are numerous examples of "NO" being turned into "YES:"

- Peter denied Jesus, but later repented
- Thomas refused to acknowledge Jesus' resurrection, but then became a believer
- Paul persecuted the Christians, but then became one of the Apostles.

Additionally, the communion of saints is full of those who turned their "NOs" into "YESs." To name just a couple:

- Augustine lived an early life of debauchery (much to the chagrin of his mother, St. Monica), but became one of the great Fathers of the Church
- While St. Ignatius of Loyola, who fancied himself a soldier and ladies-man, became (with the help of a cannonball and a book on the lives of the saints) a founder of the Jesuits!

The bottom line is this: We need not be ashamed of our "NOs," as long as we can change that "NO" to God into a "YES." For you see, we are in very good company.

So, what are the ways in which you say "NO" to God in your life? What do you need to change? The gospel today calls us to own our shortcomings:

- Do you find yourself judging others, being impatient and intolerant of those who think or act differently than you?
- Are you prejudiced towards those of different races, religions or nationalities?
- Do you find yourself so concerned about your own needs and desires that you ignore your responsibility to others, to your neighbor?

Whatever flaws you find in your life, whatever mistakes you have made, they need not control you; they do not define you. Our past does NOT determine our future. Sin can be forgiven; flaws can be mended; a life can be changed. Through our Baptism and the other sacraments, we are members of the Christian community where sinners become saints on a daily basis, where those who judge learn to understand and forgive, and where those who think only of themselves become servants of others.

It's never too late! As Pope Francis continually reminds us, God's mercy knows no bounds. With God's help, our worst "NO" can become a clear and glorious "YES!"