

Conversion and Reversion

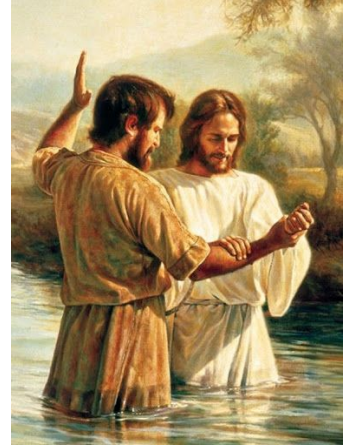
The Parable of the Two Sons, told by Jesus in *Matthew* (Mt 21:28–32), contrasts some of the tax collectors and prostitutes, rejects of high society, who accepted the message taught by John the Baptist with the "religious" people who did not.

Jesus tells a story as a parable and asks his listeners for their thoughts:

"A certain man had two sons. He came to the first, and said, 'Son, go to work in my vineyard today.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he repented, and went. He came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I will go, sir!' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?"

Like Jesus listeners, we can see that "the first son" is the answer.

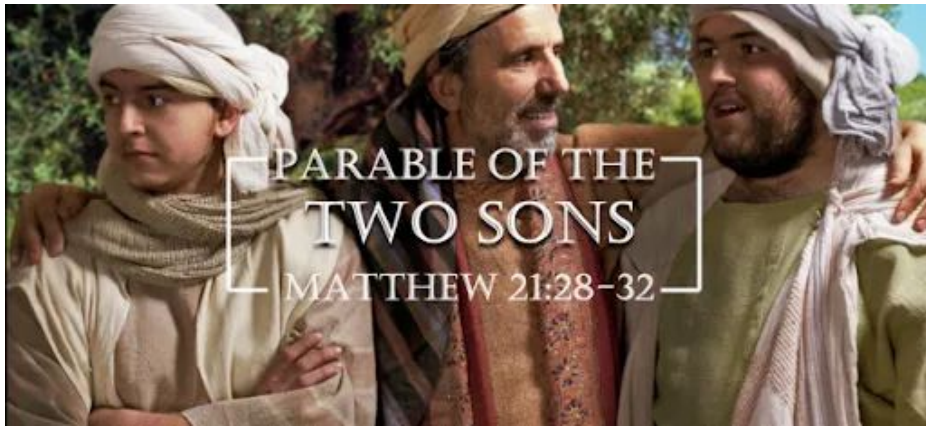
Jesus continues, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into the Kingdom of God before you. For John (the Baptist) came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes



believed him. When you saw it, you didn't even repent afterward, that you might believe him."

The situation is truly amazing and the opposite of what we might be inclined to think:

How can we interpret this parable? Jesus reproved those who considered themselves virtuous; whereas those they considered sinners, such as the tax collectors and prostitutes, were accepting the message of John the Baptist and repenting. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican has a similar theme. What is essential here is that

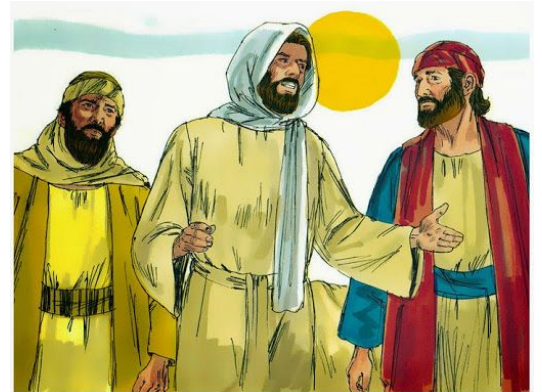


we receive Christ in faith and do our best to serve our neighbour, bearing fruit in the Spirit and always converting our lives. We need not consider ourselves to be "right with God". That is for God to know. We need only believe, surrender, pray and love.

The theme here is conversion. Those who listen and change for the better, whoever they may be, are true disciples. They may not be perfect but are at least growing in love and embarking on a positive journey. They are taking a step forward, in Christ, and in the right direction. The Holy Spirit will support this first step by grace and then offer more grace for the next step.

There is, however, a secondary theme. As well as the potential for conversion, which is in Christ and towards the Father in the Spirit, there also exists the possibility of reversion, which is the opposite; if conversion is turning away from the misuse of Creation toward the Creator, then reversion would be turning away from the Creator toward a misuse or abuse of Creation. This difference is highlighted by Ezekiel 18: "When the upright man renounces his integrity to commit sin and dies because of this, he dies because of the evil that he himself has committed. When the sinner renounces sin to become law-abiding and honest, he deserves to live. He has chosen to renounce all his previous sins; he shall certainly live; he shall not die."

Another interpretation in our time might involve showing the relationship between Christian conversion and ecological conversion, which is a right use of Creation in view of the plan of the Creator.



In this, St Paul's letter to the Philippians helps us to realize that true conversion always involves being more sensitive to the interests and needs of others and learning to integrate this with our own true good: "Always consider the other person

to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead. In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus..."

In a recent Instruction called *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community*, we find some quotes which help us to see the Eucharistic core of conversion, starting from the Christian community which came to be known as the "Parish" I include some quotes here, which call us to a *communion focussed conversion* that invites us not to be afraid to modify worn out structures in view of the needs of evangelization today:

...'Worship' itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."

[Mercy is the instrument of the communion]: "Living in communion with Christ is, therefore, anything but being passive and detached from daily life; on the contrary, it includes us more and more in the relationship with the men and women of our time, in order to offer them the concrete sign of mercy and of the attention of Christ."

(THE PASTORAL CONVERSION OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY 2020)

One commentator writes: "Because of the Eucharist, the Parish community is a visible sign and a territory of mercy. Indeed, the 'culture of encounter' is rooted in the compassion by which Jesus was moved at the sight of the wounded Samaritan. In the footsteps of Christ, the Parish becomes a place where solitude is overcome through solidarity and dialogical openness. In the spirit of mercy, the *Instruction* invites the Parish community to be missionary and to reform its structures and ministries according to the demands of evangelisation of today".

