

Homily 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2026

'There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine people who have no need of repentance.' (Lk 15:7)

No-one likes to be called a hypocrite, but what is its root? Its root is the Greek verb ὑποκρίνομαι (**hypokrinomai**), roughly meaning **"to play a part."** In the context of Greek theatre, a hypokritēs was an **actor who performed a role**, often behind a mask. At an etymological level, calling someone a **hypocrite** is connected to the idea of **"playing a part" or more negatively, as it has become, putting on a false persona**. Throughout the day we play roles and put on masks depending on our audience. We follow the prescribed script speaking in a way that the listener expects. My role and script as a dad are very different from the role I play as Leader of The Bible Study Group. In everyday life this is normal and no-one would expect otherwise but if my mask communicates a false persona, a persona which does not reflect what is really going on inside, then I become a hypocrite.

Jesus in today's Gospel Jesus doesn't mince his words with the chief priests and elders of the people and openly challenges their hypocrisy. He tells the parable of two sons whose father asks them to go and work in his vineyard. The first son initially refuses to go but later thinks better of it and goes. The second son when asked to go into his father's vineyard says, 'Yes, yes.' but doesn't go. Jesus then asks the Jewish religious leaders which of the two did the father's will? They answer that the first son who refused but then thought better of it and went. With this answer the chief priests and elders unmask and condemn themselves as hypocrites. They are the second son who says he will go to the vineyard but in the end fails in his duty to do the father's will, they preferred a blind legalism as opposed to LOVE of God and LOVE of the person in need. Jesus scolds them, 'Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For 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 when you saw it, you did not afterwards change your minds and believe him.' The religious leaders just couldn't accept their hypocrisy, repent and say 'sorry'

Being genuinely sorry is not only difficult for the chief priests and elders but it is extremely difficult for anyone. Yes, we can role play our sorrow and apologise profusely putting on the mask of sincerity, but mere words are empty unless they reflect the heartfelt sorrow deep in our souls and a firm determination never to repeat the same mistake again (a firm purpose of amendment). Ezekiel in today's First Reading urges the 'wicked' to repent, say sorry and turn from his sin, 'When a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. Because he considered, repented and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.'

None of us are perfect and no-one has the right to 'cast stones', we are all poor sinners before God. Yet, all our merciful Father expects of us is to humbly come before him and confess our faults. No big stick, no judgement, no condemnation, just pure and compassionate LOVE. Through the Sacred Liturgy of The Church Christ offers us his forgiveness and healing. Although healing is integral to all The Sacraments it is particularly present in The Sacrament of Reconciliation, The Sacrament of The Sick and of course The Eucharist. In each of these Sacraments we simply must sincerely say 'sorry' for our sins, be determined to try and avoid the same mistakes in the future and accept penance in reparation. Many of us have perhaps got out of the habit of going to 'Confession' but it is one of the most beautiful experiences of God's LOVE when a Christ-like priest and a genuine repentant sinner encounter Jesus in the Sacrament.

Absolute forgiveness of our sins is possible because in the words of today's Second Reading from St Paul to the Philippians, 'Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.'

How stunningly beautiful is that.