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HE CHANGED HIS MIND AND WENT. TAX COLLECTORS AND PROSTITUTES GO INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD BEFORE YOU – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mt 21.28-32

At that time Jesus said to his disciples, "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.

Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to 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 afterward change your minds and believe him.

The religious leaders are furious with Jesus because he has said that the temple is a den of thieves implying that they are “bandits.” So they rail against Jesus and ask with what authority Jesus does this. And Jesus does not reply.

Jesus says:” First you tell me with what authority did John the Baptist use. Did his teaching come from Heaven...” that means God “.. or from mankind?”

And the authorities did not reply. They do not reply because all that determines the behavior of the religious authority is based on their own one God. What governs their existence is their own convenience, all they do is for their own convenience.

And it is on the bases of their convenience that they reason. If we say “ from heaven”, they will say “and why did they not believe? ” Therefore they confess not to have believed God’s messenger . If we say “ from earth”, the people think that John is a prophet and therefore we lose , therefore they do not reply.

So it is to these that Jesus tells this parable of Matthew’s, chapter 21, 28-32.

So that which Jesus says is for the highest religious authorities. “*«What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son,... »*”

The Greek term used by the evangelist is full of tenderness. It is better translated as “my little son”. It is the same verb from which comes the word “birth”, therefore it is a verb of great maternal tenderness. “*«Son, go and work in the vineyard today. »*” the vineyard as we know is the image of the people of Israeli “*«And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.»*”

Therefore there is the first son that replies no to the Lord, but then he repents. “*«And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,...»*”. Never trust those that say Yes Sir! This second son does not have a good relation with the father, he did not say “Yes father”, he says “Yes Sir” He is a master to be obeyed.

“*«...but did not go. »*”. In Jesus’ words there is an echo of the complaint made by Jesus of the prophet Isaiah: “This population honours me with their voice, but their hearts are far from me” “Yes, Sir”, but they have no intention to collaborate with this master to which they answer with much respect. And Jesus had said: “not who says to me Lord Lord...” Therefore it is known that these people are already excluded from the reality of God.

And Jesus then asks the religious authority, “*«Which of the two did the will of his father? »*” Here appears the word “Father”. It would have been better if also this time they had been quiet, made no reply. But they reply. “*«They said, 'The first. »*”

“*Jesus said to them, «Truly,... »*” therefore a solemn and important statement, “*«...I say to you,.. »*” And Jesus sets against the elderly chief priests, the first in society, the intimates of God, the tax collectors and prostitutes, the dregs of society, those excluded from God.

“*«...the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you »*”. The Greek verb construction, translates with “to go before”, it does not indicate previously, that is they go in front and then you come, but indicates exclusion, meaning they have taken your place.

The ones you think are responsible for the delay of the kingdom of God, they are already there and you have been left outside. And Jesus concludes: “*« For John...»*”, here the argument returns to the Baptist “*«..came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him »*”.

The religious leaders will never believe in God’s messenger. Never! They are completely adverse to divine announcements. They are completely deaf to the Lord’s words. “*«..the tax collectors and the prostitutes»*”, they are the category considered by God, the ones that were believed to be the reason for the delay of the kingdom, “in fact they believed in Him”

“*«And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him. »*”. So three times in Matthew’s Gospel appears the words “to change your mind or repent” Here in the parable of the son that changed his mind, in the case of the traitor Judah that changed his mind, but the authority no. The authority will never change its mind. Yes, Judah changed his mind, but authority will

never change their minds, because what determines their behavior is convenience, the only God in which they believe.

They have no other divinity to answer to. The evangelist makes us understand that the religious authority are completely adverse to Jesus' good news because they could lose their authority, their privileges and prestige. And Jesus' good news is an invitation to be an expression of love for those that serve mankind.