Deacon Randy Perkins
Ezekiel 18:25-28
Philippians 2:1-11
Matthew 21:28-32

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Epiphany Catholic Church
Louisville, KY, USA
September 27, 2026

A politician running for a statewide office was campaigning in a remote rural community he'd never visited before. At a town hall meeting, he asked, "What is it your community needs?" The city's mayor said, "We have two needs. The first one is we have a small hospital, but we don't have a resident doctor." The politician, flexing his connections, said, "Give me one minute," and he pulled out his cell phone and made a call. After just a one- or two- minute phone conversation, he ended his call, put away his phone, and said, "My friends, I've just taken steps to resolve your problem, and you will have a doctor here in the community the day after I win the election!"

"Now, what's your second dilemma?" The mayor again answered, "Sir, our second problem is that there's no cell phone service anywhere in this town."

If there's one thing we don't like about politicians, it's that they're always making promises they don't keep. Their actions after elections don't match up to their words during the campaign. And to be honest, they're easy targets. Everything they say is on record, everything they do is documented, and plenty of people are out there to critique whether they're doing what they said they'd do!

The question I pose for us to consider today is this: In terms of our Christian lives, our faith and prayer lives, do the prayers we profess line up with the lives we live?

In today's gospel, Jesus, once again, finds himself confronting the religious leaders of his day, whom he so regularly chastised for failing to live up to their own teachings. And he offers a parable of a father and his two sons. The father goes to the first son and says, "Son, go out and work in the vineyard today." The son says, "I will not," but he eventually changes his mind and does what he's asked to do. The father approaches the second son, "Go out and work in the vineyard

today," and the second son says the right thing: "Yes, sir." But he never goes. And Jesus asks, "Which of the two did his father's will?"

It's not a complex theological dilemma. The answer is obvious. But just because the answer is obvious doesn't make the teaching any easier.

If Jesus were here today, standing at this ambo, and he shared this same parable with us, what kind of emotions would you experience? I don't know about you, but I'd be squirming in my seat, kind of like when the pastor gives the dreaded tithing talk! 😊

I'd be uncomfortable because I know my words don't always match my actions. Claiming the label "Christian" is easy; living like Christ is a whole different thing. Transforming our prayers *in* Mass into action *outside* of Mass is the struggle as old as religion. To use the political analogy, campaigning is one thing, but governing is another thing altogether.

Today, the last Sunday in September, the church designates as the "World Day of Migrants and Refugees;" so it's appropriate for us to apply Jesus' parable to the context of how our Christian obligations regarding immigrants line up with our actions in our daily lives.

Unfortunately, immigration is a sensitive subject these days. But, you know, World Day of Migrants and Refugees isn't a new event; in fact, this is the 112th year we've recognized the World Day of Migrants and Refugees! It began in 1914 after a massive wave of Italian refugees flooded across European borders trying to escape grinding rural poverty and unjust living conditions. And that wave created stresses on the receiving countries, and those stresses created fear and mistrust and resentment, and that fear and mistrust and resentment manifested in mistreatment. So, Pope Benedict XV spoke out and established a day set aside to honor and reflect on how we treat migrants and refugees.

And that wasn't the first time in history there was a need to address the treatment of migrants. Jesus himself recognized the mistreatment often leveled against foreigners, the culturally different, and praised those who rejected such mistreatment: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

And Jesus wasn't the first to live in a time where immigrants were mistreated. From the time of Moses, the Torah in Leviticus 19 addressed the problem of Israelites mistreating foreigners: "When an alien resides with you in

your land, you shall not oppress the alien. . . . [Y]ou shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

My point is this: The plight of the immigrant is not new. It's an age-old struggle. But whether it's Moses directing the Israelites, Jesus teaching his earliest disciples, Pope Benedict XV instituting a day dedicated to recognizing the plight of migrants, or Pope Leo XIV in 2026 reminding us that immigrants are not just statistics but individuals with personal stories and dreams, the clarion call to Christians is that immigrants are human beings created in the image of God. They are our neighbors, and we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, with a specific preference for the most vulnerable.

To be clear, none of these great Christian leaders was out promoting a specific immigration policy. They weren't campaigning for any specific political agenda or party. When Jesus told followers to love the stranger as they loved themselves, he wasn't specifically critiquing Jewish and Roman law, he was teaching his disciples God's commandment about how we are to treat immigrants. It transcends any political categorization. It supersedes any political loyalty. It is a call, a commandment, to recognize and honor the God-given dignity imbued in every person, regardless their circumstances, their origin, or their ethnicity. Not just in the words we profess at church, but in our lives outside of church.

In just a few moments, as we do every time we celebrate Mass, we'll offer our prayers and petitions to God; and just like every week, they'll include a prayer for the poor, the misplaced, the forgotten, the most vulnerable. Today, our petition will ask for God's grace using these words: "that we may hear their cry and respond with compassion, generosity, and meaningful action."

The question is whether we will transform our prayer into any meaningful action? Will our actions *outside* of Mass reflect the words we profess *inside* of Mass? Will we hear their cry? Will we respond with compassion, generosity, and meaningful action? Will we do our part?

Making promises is easy; making those promises reality requires integrity and action. But just like the sons in today's parable, Jesus doesn't call us to come here and offer empty words and promises; he calls us to go out into the vineyard and get the work done.