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The 26 Martyrs Monument on Nishizaka Hill in Nagasaki, Japan, honors Catholic saints who were executed there in 1597. (Unsplash/Adrienne Merritt)



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What should a 17th-century Jesuit have done when Japanese officials said they would continue to torture faithful Christians until he desecrated an image of Christ? That dilemma is the driving force of Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence*. While others suffered, the sacrilege of stomping on the image would be understood as a public admission that he had abandoned Christ/Christianity.

In his despairing confusion, caught between religious faithfulness and human compassion, Father Rodrigues hears Christ say, "Come ahead now. It's all right. Step on me. I understand your pain and your suffering. I was born into this world to share men's pain. I carried this cross for your pain." He took the step and was labeled an apostate, a failed priest. But was he?

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[September 27, 2026](#)

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Psalm 25

Philippians 2:1-11

Matthew 21:28-32

Today, Jesus offers us a dilemma that, at first, seems less serious. When he says, "A man had two sons," the audience knows that conflict is coming. In Jesus' tale, the man asks his son to work. The son replies bluntly: "I will not." An absolutely shocking statement — tantamount to renouncing his father.

The other son speaks exactly as one should in his culture, ostensibly respecting anything his father said. He understood that no good son would disrespect his father by refusing his command. Good relationships kept the family and ultimately the entire society in equilibrium. Everyone knew that and everyone could see who fulfilled their responsibility and who acted like a reprobate. The son who said yes to his father upheld the family and social structure.

Although it seems obvious to us that the first son eventually acted faithfully while the other failed, in Middle Eastern cultures, that would not be so clear. From that cultural perspective, both sons failed their father. Paradoxically, at the same time,

both sons respected the father.

When faced with this sort of situation, we might be tempted to echo what we hear from Ezekiel: "The Lord's ways are not fair!"

The short passage we hear from Ezekiel today describes virtuous and wicked people. In the first case, someone who has been seen as good ends up choosing evil. The second is the opposite: Someone who has habitually acted sinfully turns away from that way of life. Who is good and who is not?

The issue at stake here is who genuinely desires to live in God's love and who does not? Who genuinely listens to God?

Paul takes us to the heart of the matter in this famous passage from Philippians. Encouraging his community to live as images of Christ, he tells them that they can't grasp at appearances, be they of status or piety. Rather, he said, cultivate humble obedience.

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If we go to the roots of the word *obedience*, we discover that it means to listen to another, to pay attention. That, in itself, sets us on the road of humility. Listening like that, allowing another to sway us, implies emptying ourselves of egoism, the "me-firstism" that leads us to look out for number one without consideration or perhaps even awareness of the effects our actions have on the rest of the world.

Today's Liturgy of the Word reminds us of how difficult it is to discern which values outrank others. Is there always a right answer?

Today, all three of our readings orient us to developing our relationship with God, especially through service to others. One son upheld social structures, but in a static way. In the end, he didn't contribute to the father's project in life. Keeping up appearances has its value, but it can also foster passivity instead of active concern for others. The other son, rebellious as he started out, ended up contributing to the father's work and thus to the good of all.

In the encyclical [*Magnifica Humanitas*](#), Pope Leo XIV tells us: "For a Christian, going beyond the narrow confines of one's own interests and committing oneself, within

the limits of one's ability, to the common good is a non-negotiable value." Non-negotiable. That's pretty strong language.

The first son acted from a particular concept of the common good; he was sincerely upholding the family's values. For him, Rodrigues would have been an apostate. The second son treated his father sacrilegiously, then came round to respecting the importance of his father's work and went into the field. He would have seen Rodrigues as a genuine pastor, sacrificing himself for others.

Today's readings remind us that while our religious life has to do with love and respect for God and others, it's not always clear how to do it. We can only strive to hone our hearts to discern God's will, the common good. Did Father Rodrigues act like an apostate or a saint? Who knows?

Let us pray, "Lord, lead us not into temptation like Rodrigues. We only know our daily discerning of your will offers more than enough challenge!"