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St. Bernard Church
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SAYING YES OR NO TO JESUS

Before I get into the main point of today's Gospel from Matthew, Chapter 21, I think it might be helpful to point out that, at the very beginning of this Gospel, Jesus gives us important and helpful guidance in how to start a conversation with someone on a difficult issue.

He says to His audience, "What is your opinion?" Then he describes a hypothetical situation and asks them another question: "Which of the two sons did the father's will?"

Starting a conversation with a question and then asking follow-up questions do two things: This shows respect for the audience and an openness to how the listeners might respond.

This is great advice right now when politics in our country have become so divisive.

We can follow this advice by asking someone who we think favors another candidate or party than we do what specific policies they hope that candidate or party will follow.

If they mention one or more policies, ask more questions. Address, in a diplomatic way, the reasonableness of the policies. You might ask if they have some data to back up their position. Stay away from personalities of specific candidates. Discuss policies, not personalities.

Okay. Back to the Gospel.

The story Jesus uses in the Gospel about the two sons raises some great questions. I'm going to take my cue from Jesus this morning and ask you questions instead of just making plain statements.

Let's start with this: Why do we sometimes say "no" when we know we should say "Yes?" How often do we do this?

Are we willing to reflect on our "no," apologize, and do what we know is right?

Here's an even bigger question: How often do we say "yes" and not really mean it?

Maybe we say “yes” just to end a conversation or to get the person asking the question to go away. Maybe we say “yes” to get something we want even though our “yes” is misleading.

It used to be a badge of honor in our country to be a man of your word or a woman of your word. To be known as a person of integrity. If you tell someone you’re going to do something, everyone knows you will. You will follow through. Your word is completely reliable.

This used to be a hugely important quality in a person. Being a person who really means what he or she says is the basis of trust. Without trust, things get messy. Relationships break down. Communities no longer function well.

Today, conversations have become dominated by hype, by posturing. We can almost assume that much of what we hear from another person is exaggerated or distorted. People are actually trained to say things people want to hear as a means of manipulating them.

One of my favorite cartoons shows a politician speaking to a big audience. The politician says, “I regret that my poor choice of words caused some people to understand what I was saying.”

The biggest question raised by today’s Gospel relates to the basic issue of how deeply we are committed to our faith in God.

Have we said “Yes” to our Catholic faith but not really meant it? Was our “yes” really a “maybe” or a “partly?”

How many times have we said in the Lord’s Prayer “thy will be done,” with no intention of really meaning it? Or maybe we say it without thinking at all about what we’re saying?

Our faith comes down to answering two fundamental questions.

The first is the question Jesus asked Peter three times. “Do you love me?” Do we love Jesus?

The second flows from our answer to the first question. Jesus asks each of us, “Am I your Lord and Master?”

Can we say “Yes” to these two questions, and really mean it?