



Archdiocese of San Antonio  
Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller



## Homily – Shalom Festival September 28, 2014

We gather here in the presence of God the Father and the risen Lord Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit! We greet everyone whom we encounter by offering them *Shalom! Salaam! Peace!* The prophet Ezekiel originally spoke to God's people who were in Exile – far from home, far from the Promised Land. They had been there for many years and some complained that God is not fair! How often do we hear something similar today? "It's not fair!" We avoid responsibility by blaming someone else, making excuses, or simply crying that life is not fair. It is not! Life is not fair! But the injustices we experience are caused by us humans, not by God. Through the prophet, God makes it clear that each one is responsible for his or her own life – to walk in the way of good or the way of evil – to cultivate a culture of life or a culture of death. But we will ultimately be held accountable for our choices by God!

Paul's Letter to the Philippians shows us the true route to take on our life journey. Imitate Jesus. "Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interest, but also everyone for those of others." Today's culture emphasizes looking out for one's own interests, and there may be some truth in this if our interests do not infringe upon other peoples' interests – or, indeed, their basic needs! We are all children of the one God, sisters and brothers in the Lord Jesus. We are a family, and families take care of one another – especially the more vulnerable members.

Paul's words are not idealistic. They are as real as the example of Jesus who, although he was equal to God the Father, emptied himself, became a vulnerable human

person, and was obedient to his Father's will even to death, a terrible death on the cross. God raised him up, and we in faith proclaim "Jesus Christ is Lord!" Lord of the universe, Lord of our lives. But the key to this teaching is the importance of saying "Yes" to God's will, even when it goes against our human inclinations or desires. What do we mean by our Yes?

The Gospel of Matthew likes to point out the consequences of a split between saying and doing – between saying Yes to God and actually doing his will. There is another contrast in today's gospel. There are two groups of people in the story – actually three. First, Pharisees and scribes, the Jewish leaders. They were very keen to learn what God commanded in his Law. Second, there were public sinners (prostitutes) and tax collectors (the scum of society who were cooperating with the hated Roman army). The third group is the disciples and crowds who encounter Jesus along the way – we stand with this third group.

Jesus proclaims the arrival of the kingdom of God – a place of justice, peace, harmony, compassion, unity, and love. The Pharisees and scribes promised to obey God's word but fail to act on Jesus' message about the kingdom. In fact, they reject him and his message – like the son in the parable who says yes, but does nothing. The public sinners and tax collectors were known to say no to God's law, but they accept Jesus and his message and their lives are transformed through their encounter with him – like the second son who says no but then does what his father asks.

This is decision time for us – actually, every day. Will we stand with the Pharisees and scribes looking down on sinners? Or will we stand with the sinners, recognizing our need for healing, forgiveness, and carrying out the message of the kingdom. This is at the heart of the new evangelization. Choose life. Choose to walk in Jesus' way, imitating him. Proclaim the gospel in word and deed!