

The Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Roman Missal, Third Edition · Lectionary for Mass, no. 136

the two sons and the way of the Lord: three interpretations compared

Element	Text and reference	What it says
Entrance Antiphon	<i>Omnia, quae fecisti nobis</i> ; Dan 3:29–31, 42–43, adapted	Azarias's prayer: all the Lord did to his people was true judgment, for they sinned; may he glorify his name and show mercy.
Collect	<i>Deus, qui omnipotentiam tuam</i>	God's almighty power is shown above all in sparing and mercy; those who run toward his promises ask to share the goods of heaven.
First Reading	Ezek 18:25–28	To the complaint that the Lord's way is not right: the just man who turns to iniquity dies; the wicked man who turns to justice lives.
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 25 (24):4–5, 6–7, 8–9; response v. 6a	A prayer to be shown God's ways and to be remembered in compassion, not for the sins of youth; he gives a law to sinners and teaches the meek.
Second Reading	Longer form: Phil 2:1–11	One mind and humility, each esteeming others better; the mind of Christ Jesus, who emptied himself, obeyed unto the cross and was exalted.
Second Reading Alleluia verse	Shorter form: Phil 2:1–5 Jn 10:27, speaker formula added	The same appeal, ending with the call to have the mind of Christ Jesus. "My sheep hear my voice. And I know them: and they follow me."
Gospel	Mt 21:28–32	The son who refused and then went and the son who promised and did not; the publicans and harlots who believed John go first.
Prayer over the Offerings	<i>Concede nobis, misericors Deus</i>	That the offering be accepted and open the fountain of every blessing.
Communion Antiphon	First option: <i>Memento verbi tui</i> ; cf. Ps 119 (118):49–50	Adapted: the servant asks God to remember the word in which he gave him hope, his comfort in lowliness.
Communion Antiphon	Second option: <i>In hoc cognovimus</i> ; 1 Jn 3:16	God's charity is known in that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
Prayer after Communion	<i>Sit nobis, Domine, reparatio mentis et corporis</i>	Repair of mind and body by the heavenly mystery; a share in Christ's glory as fellow heirs for those who share his sufferings.

The two forms of the second reading are alternatives, and so are the two Communion antiphons (the second under *Vel*); every other element is required. Scripture is quoted in the Douay–Rheims (Challoner), a public-domain study translation, not the Lectionary's approved English proclaimed at Mass; psalms are numbered as in the Lectionary, the Vulgate's number in parentheses.

Sense	Synthesis
Literal	Ezekiel answers exiles who call the Lord's way unfair: the just man who turns to iniquity dies, the wicked man who turns lives. Jesus asks the chief priests and ancients which of two sons did the father's will, and says that the publicans and harlots who believed John go before them. Paul asks for one mind and humility after the mind of Christ, who in the longer form emptied himself and obeyed unto the cross.
Allegorical	The father is God, who calls by an inward inspiration, and his "to day" is the whole of a life (Aquinas, on Matthew). The sons are the nations, who refused and then believed, and the people who promised at Sinai and did not go (Jerome, Chrysostom, Aquinas); Hilary reverses them. In the longer form, Christ is the Son who obeyed and so honoured the Father (Chrysostom), the lowly God who found proud man (Augustine).
Moral	Let no one in vice despair, and no one in virtue slumber (Chrysostom); no one has promised you tomorrow (Augustine); the worst is he who does not repent of what he has done (Aquinas), who applies the second son to clerics and religious. Count others better than yourself, by the divine image in them if by nothing else (Aquinas); where the second Communion antiphon is chosen, begin to lay down your life by giving to a brother in need (Augustine, on 1 John 3).
Anagogical	Each will be judged in that in which he is found (Jerome, on Ezekiel), so the penitent must persevere (Aquinas), and merits meet for the last judgment will be required (Augustine, on the psalm). The shepherd chooses the simple from each nation for eternal life (Gregory, on John 10:16). Exaltation follows humility (Hilary, on the servant's lowliness, where the first Communion antiphon is chosen; Aquinas, on Philippians, where the longer form is read), and in that form every knee bows at the name of Jesus; the communicants ask to be fellow heirs of his glory.

Scriptural Date and Location

Textual unit	Citation	Location	Date
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 25 (24):4–5, 6–7, 8–9; response v. 6a	No place named in the verses	Composition: Before c. 165 B.C.
Inherited attribution: the Vulgate title, in the Douay–Rheims “Unto the end, a psalm for David” (24:1), ascribes the psalm to David; it gives no date and does not place the psalm in his reign. An alphabetic prayer for guidance and pardon. The date is the Psalter’s common critical bound, from the introduction to the Psalms in the New American Bible Revised Edition, which holds that no psalm can be dated securely; it is not a date for this psalm.			
Communion Antiphon, first option	cf. Ps 119 (118):49–50, an adaptation	No place named in the verses	Composition: Before c. 165 B.C.
The strophe of the letter Zain in the long alphabetic psalm on God’s law. The psalm has no attributive title (the Vulgate prints only <i>Alleluia</i>), and no traditional date is held. The date is the same common bound, not a date for this psalm.			
First Reading	Ezek 18:25–28	Among the captives “by the river Chobar” (1:1–3); addressed to “the house of Israel” (18:25)	Historical setting: Preferred: In the eighth year of his reign; alternatives: A.M. 3405, B.C. 597, B.C. 598. Prophecy given: “he prophesied during at least twenty-two years” (duration).
Traditional attribution: “Ezekiel the priest the son of Buzi” (1:3). Chapter 18 has no date formula; it stands between the oracles dated to the sixth year of the captivity (8:1) and the seventh (20:1). The setting answers date the captivity on which the book is framed, not this oracle: the preferred label is the Douay–Rheims phrase for Joachin’s surrender (4 Kgs 24:12), in Nabuchodonosor’s reign; the A.M. figure is Usher’s reckoning as Haydock reports it. The two B.C. figures are Reid’s date for the surrender and Schets’s for Ezekiel’s deportation, a year earlier, in the <i>Catholic Encyclopedia</i> . Schets’s reading of 29:17 gives the prophecy duration.			
Entrance Antiphon	Dan 3:29–31, 42–43 (Vulgate), adapted	Nabuchodonosor’s furnace, “of the province of Babylon” (3:1, 20–25)	Historical setting: “seventy years” (duration). Composition: Most likely long after the Exile.
<i>Narrated event: the prayer of Azarias in the midst of the fire.</i>			
The Missal cites the verses in the order 31, 29, 30, 43, 42, from the part of Daniel 3 that the Greek Bible and the Vulgate carry and the Hebrew does not. The setting answer is the seventy years of service to Babylon foretold by Jeremias (Jer 25:11–12), the exile in which the book places the scene. The composition answer is Gigot’s judgment in the <i>Catholic Encyclopedia</i> (“Book of Daniel”) on 3:24–90, ascribed to “some unknown Jewish author”; he reports that “nearly all Catholic writers” of his day referred the prayer to Daniel’s time.			
Gospel	Mt 21:28–32	In the temple at Jerusalem, to “the chief priests and ancients of the people” (21:23)	Event – No narrated-event date in the chronology corpus. Composition – disputed: c. A.D. 38–45; c. A.D. 40–42; A.D. 40–45; c. A.D. 60–68; c. A.D. 64–67; c. A.D. 50.
<i>Narrated event: a parable spoken after the question about Jesus’ authority and John’s baptism (21:23–27).</i>			
Traditional attribution: St Matthew the Apostle. No date is held for the narrated event. The disputed figures are those the <i>Catholic Encyclopedia</i> reports: Jacquier’s, from ancient writers “at variance” and from Catholic critics where “opinion is rather divided”, and last Durand’s, for an original text he holds to have been Aramaic. They date the book, not the saying.			
Alleluia verse	Jn 10:27, with a speaker formula added	The temple, “in Solomon’s porch”, at the Dedication, in winter (10:22–23)	Composition – disputed: c. A.D. 90–100; A.D. 96–100.
<i>Narrated event: Jesus’ answer to those who asked him to say plainly whether he was the Christ.</i>			
Traditional attribution: St John the Apostle. The first range is Durand’s for “the Johannine writings”; the second is “the general opinion” Fonck reports after conceding that “we possess no certain historical information”. They date the book, not the discourse.			
Second Reading, longer form	Phil 2:1–11	From Paul “in my bands” (1:7, 13), at Rome in the sources cited; to the saints “at Philippi” (1:1)	Composition – disputed: A.D. 61; A.D. 62–64.
Second Reading, shorter form	Phil 2:1–5	As for the longer form	Composition – disputed: A.D. 61; A.D. 62–64.
Traditional attribution: St Paul, writing in captivity. The first figure is the year Prat gives the letters of the captivity; the second is Vander Heeren’s range for Paul “at Rome”, where he adds that critics disagree whether the letter falls early or late in the Roman stay.			
Communion Antiphon, second option	1 Jn 3:16	No place named in the letter	Composition: c. A.D. 90–100.
Traditional attribution: St John the Apostle. The range is Durand’s for “the Johannine writings”; Drum finds the arguments “probable in favour of Ephesus and also for the last few years of the first century”.			

The Propers: Themes and Movement

This Mass asks what God judges when he judges a man: the first word or the last deed. A son says “I will not” and afterwards goes; another says “I go, Sir” and does not go. The chief priests and ancients who would not believe John are asked which of the two did the father’s will, and they answer against themselves. Ezekiel has already given the Lord’s side of the question, “Is it my way that is not right?” Around the two readings the other texts set a confession of sin, a prayer to be shown the Lord’s ways, the mind of Christ Jesus, and a table at which the life laid down for us is received.

- **Confession and mercy:** the Entrance Antiphon and the Collect.
- **The complaint answered:** the first reading and the psalm.
- **The mind of Christ and the question about John:** second reading, Alleluia verse, Gospel.
- **Offering and table:** Prayer over the Offerings, Communion antiphons, Prayer after Communion.

The antiphons and orations are the Missal’s for the Twenty-sixth Week in Ordinary Time and serve all three years; the readings, psalm and acclamation are Year A’s, Lectionary no. 136. The books state three relations: the first reading is chosen for the Gospel, the psalm responds to it, and the acclamation greets the Gospel. Philippians and Matthew each follow a course of their own.

The *Ordo lectionum Missae* sets a title over each reading: *Cum averterit se impius ab impietate sua, animam suam vivificabit*, when the wicked man turns from his wickedness he gives his soul life, condensed from Ezekiel 18:27; *Paenitentia motus abiit. Publicani et meretrices praecedunt vos in regnum Dei*, moved by repentance he went; the publicans and harlots go before you into the kingdom of God, from Matthew 21:29 and 31; and *Sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Iesu*, have in you the mind that was in Christ Jesus, from Philippians 2:5. The two correlated titles both fall on repentance.

A confession, and a power shown in sparing

The Entrance Antiphon, *Omnia, quae fecisti nobis, Domine*, is made from five verses of the prayer of Azarias in Nabuchodonosor’s furnace, in the part of Daniel 3 that the Greek Bible and the Vulgate carry and the Hebrew does not. It confesses that all the Lord has done to his people he did in true judgment, because they sinned and did not obey, and it asks glory for his name and mercy for them. The men who pray it are in the fire because they refused to sin, and still they say “we have sinned”.

The Collect, *Deus, qui omnipotentiam tuam*, names the God to whom that confession is made. His almighty power is shown above all in sparing and in mercy, and his grace is asked for those who run toward his promises, that they may share the goods of heaven.

The complaint about the Lord’s way

Ezekiel 18 answers a proverb of the exiles, that the fathers ate sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge. Every soul is the Lord’s and each answers for itself: the wicked man who does penance lives, and the just man who turns away dies. The appointed verses begin with the complaint the Lord reports, “And you have said: The way of the Lord is not right”. He turns it back, “are not rather your ways perverse?”, and restates the two cases. A little before them stands the chapter’s question: “Is it my will that a sinner should die . . . and not that he should be converted from his ways, and live?” (18:23).

The psalm answers as the prayer of one who wants to walk that way. It asks to be shown the Lord’s ways and taught his paths, begs him to remember his compassion and not the sins of youth, and confesses that he “will give a law to sinners in the way” and “teach the meek his ways”. Three families of words run through these texts: the Lord’s way, remembering and not remembering, and humility. That is an observation about their wording.

The mind of Christ and the question about John

Paul's appeal begins with a "therefore" that joins it to the conflict the Philippians share with him. He asks for one mind and one charity, nothing done "through contention" or "vain glory", each to "esteem others better than themselves"; and he names its ground, "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus". The longer form goes on with the hymn: Christ emptied himself, became "obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross", and was given "a name which is above all names". The shorter form ends at v. 5, and there only the appeal and the name of Christ's mind are read.

The acclamation sings "My sheep hear my voice", which John places at the feast of the Dedication just after "you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep" (Jn 10:26). The Gospel has its own setting in the temple. The chief priests and ancients have asked Jesus by what authority he acts; he has asked them whether John's baptism was from heaven, and they would not say. The parable follows at once, and after it the parable of the wicked husbandmen, which the chief priests and Pharisees knew "he spoke of them" (21:45).

Asked which son did the father's will, they answer "The first", and Jesus turns the first son's words on them in the negative: they "did not even afterwards repent", and the publicans and harlots who believed John go before them. Not every witness to the text has this order of the sons and this answer; the Lectionary's text has both.

An offering and a table

The Prayer over the Offerings, *Concede nobis, misericors Deus*, asks that the offering be accepted and open the fountain of every blessing. In the prayer from which the Entrance Antiphon comes, Azarias, with no sacrifice left to offer, asks that the people be accepted "in a contrite heart and humble spirit" (Dan 3:39). At Communion the Missal gives two antiphons. Its rubric for Ordinary Time prefers the one that agrees with the Gospel; neither of these is drawn from a Gospel, and the books do not say whether either agrees with this one.

The servant of Psalm 118 asks God to remember the word in which he gave hope, his comfort in his lowliness. The verse of John's letter says that God's charity is known because "he hath laid down his life for us" and that "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren", just before it sets word against deed, "not in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18). The Prayer after Communion, *Sit nobis, Domine, reparatio mentis et corporis*, asks that the heavenly mystery repair mind and body, and it joins sharing the Lord's sufferings to a share in his glory as fellow heirs, the pairing of Romans 8:17.

Three answers to one question

The Fathers and Doctors who expounded these passages answer the Sunday's question along three lines, and each line, carried through every text of the Mass, yields an interpretation of the whole. The first hears in the prophecy and the parable one law of judgment for every person: God judges each where he is found, so that no sinner may despair of turning and no just man may rest on his past. The second follows Jerome, Chrysostom and Aquinas in reading the two sons as two peoples, keeps the parable's first hearers in view, and meets Hilary of Poitiers, who assigns the sons the other way round.

The third begins from the second reading: Christ is the Son who obeyed unto death, and his humble obedience is both pattern and power for the disciple's. The first two rest on the one correlation the books state, whose titles fall on repentance, and they are complementary, since they ask who the sons were in the history of salvation and who they are in every life. The third reads the Mass from the second reading, under the title *Sentite in vobis*, and from the Communion antiphons, and it differs in kind; where the shorter form is read, it keeps only Paul's appeal and the name of Christ's mind. None of these witnesses expounds this Mass as a whole.

The Propers: Detailed Commentary

Which of the two sons? Persons, peoples, and a reversal

The parable is spoken to men who have just declined to answer a question, and Chrysostom watches how Jesus lets them pass sentence on themselves. He causes “the judgment to be delivered by themselves”, so that they are “self-condemned”; had he said at once that harlots go before them, “the word would have seemed to them to be offensive; but now, being uttered after their own judgment it appears to be not too hard” (*Homilies on Matthew* 67.2–3). Who the two sons are, beyond that scene, the witnesses answer in two ways.

Aquinas sets three readings side by side. One is *duo genera hominum, iusti, et peccatores*, two kinds of men, and he defines both at once: not the just in general but those who profess themselves just, and not sinners in general but those who do penance (*Super Matthaeum* c. 21). That is the first interpretation’s reading. Jerome knew it and did not make it his own: *Alii vero non putant Gentilium et Iudaeorum esse parabolam, sed simpliciter peccatorum et iustorum*, others think the parable is not of Gentiles and Jews but simply of sinners and the just (*Commentarii in Matthaeum* III, PL 26, 155–156).

His own reading, and Chrysostom’s and the first of Aquinas’s, is that of the second interpretation: the sons are two peoples. For Jerome the first is the people of the Gentiles, called through its knowledge of the natural law, which answered proudly *Nolo*, I will not, and afterwards, at the Saviour’s coming, did penance and *sermonis contumaciam labore correxit*, corrected the defiance of its word by its labour; the second is the people that answered Moses, *Omnia quaecumque dixerit Dominus faciemus*, all that the Lord shall say we will do, and did not go. Chrysostom says the same: “these two children declare what came to pass with respect to both the Gentiles and the Jews”: the one people “showed forth their obedience in their works”, and the other, having said “All that the Lord shall speak, we will do, and will hearken”, “in their works were disobedient” (67.2). Aquinas makes the first son the people of the Gentiles, *qui incepit a Noe, sicut populus Iudaeorum ab Abraham*, which began from Noah as the people of the Jews began from Abraham. The three agree on the identification and on its ground, the promise given at Sinai. They differ in what they draw from it. Jerome ties the second son’s failure to the killing of the heir, in words borrowed from the next parable; Chrysostom keeps open a hope for those who were behind; Aquinas turns the second son on the Church, where clerics and religious also profess justice.

Hilary of Poitiers reads the same two groups the other way round, and the disagreement is textual as well as exegetical. His text, with the Lectionary’s order of the sons, had the Pharisees answer by naming the younger. He tests the identification of the elder son with Israel and the younger with the nations, which is not Jerome’s, Chrysostom’s or Aquinas’s, and finds that it fails: *Atquin Israel non poenituit, sed in Dominum manus intulit*, yet Israel did not repent but laid hands on the Lord, and the people of the nations and of sinners did what it promised. His answer places both sons among John’s hearers. The first is the people of the Pharisees, warned through John, who refused and afterwards, through the miracles done after the Lord’s resurrection, repented and believed under the apostles; the younger is the people of publicans and sinners, who believed John but could not yet take up the work of the Gospel before the Passion, *obediens professione, licet non efficiens in tempore*, obedient in profession though not yet accomplishing it in time (*Commentarius in Matthaeum* 21.11–15, PL 9, 1039–1041). Jerome quotes the hearers’ answer as *Novissimus* and says that the true copies read not “the last” but “the first”, *ut proprio iudicio condemnentur*, so that they are condemned by their own judgment (PL 26, 156). In the Lectionary’s text the hearers name the first son. Hilary and Jerome still agree on what puts the publicans first: their response to John.

The third interpretation does not ask who the sons are. No witness joins Philippians 2 to the parable, and setting Christ beside the sons as the Son whose yes was done to the end is the editor’s proposal. The first two readings, on the other hand, are complementary. Chrysostom and Aquinas give the peoples first and

then turn the parable on persons, and the two readings answer different questions: who the sons were in the history of salvation, and who they are in every life.

The way of the Lord, level in both directions

To the complaint *Non est aequa via Domini*, the Lord's way is not level, Jerome gives the Lord's reason why his way is equal: *in utroque non praeterita, sed praesentia [iudicatur]*, in both cases it is not what is past but what is present that is judged. As old offences do not weigh on the just man who was once a sinner, so old justices do not help the sinner who was once just; *Unusquisque enim in quo invenietur, in eo iudicabitur*, each will be judged in that in which he is found (*In Hiezechielem* VI, PL 25, 180; the bracketed word is supplied in the printed edition). The people call the way unlevel because it does not keep to the past, their own or their fathers'; it is level because it is the same in both directions. On v. 23 Jerome adds the sentence that governs every severe word of the chapter: God's sentence, however harsh it seems, *non homines, sed peccata condemnat*, condemns not men but sins.

On vv. 26–29 he offers a second understanding. Israel, once just, turned from its justice in denying the Son of God, and the people of the nations, impious in its idolatry, will give its soul life if it turns. On the complaint of v. 29 he writes a hard sentence of his own, *Usque hodie Israel blasphematur Deum, cur populum suum reliquerit, et gentium assumpserit multitudinem*, to this day Israel blasphemes God for leaving his people and taking up the multitude of the nations, and he calls just the Lord's sentence that the vineyard be given to other husbandmen (Lk 20:16). The commentary does not end there. On v. 30 Jerome says that with God there is no respect of persons, *sed unusquisque sua coronabitur fide*, but each will be crowned by his own faith; and the call to a new heart in v. 31, said properly to Israel, can be understood *ad utrumque populum*, of both peoples: Israel's new heart is to believe in him whom it had denied, and the nations' is to leave their idols (PL 25, 181).

The identification of the second son with the Jewish people is the exegesis of Jerome, Chrysostom and Aquinas. The Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra aetate* governs how such readings are taught and preached today: "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers"; what happened in the Passion "cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today"; and the Jews "should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures" (no. 4). The Fathers' own texts set limits beside their reading. Matthew names the parable's hearers as the chief priests and ancients (21:23) and the chief priests and Pharisees (21:45); Jerome's sentence on v. 29 stands beside his new heart for Israel; and Aquinas turns the parable on the Church's own members, so that the baptized can become the second son.

Augustine hears Ezekiel's complaint in another place and names no people. Expounding the verse of Psalm 17 on God's dealing with the froward, he finds there those who say that the way of the Lord is not right: "Now this seems froward to the froward, that Thou wilt make them whole that confess their sins"; and God humbles those who are "ignorant of God's righteousness, and seek to establish their own" (*Enarrationes in Psalmos* 17.27–28). For him the complaint belongs to anyone who resents mercy shown to the penitent. The third interpretation hears the first reading through this passage, as a way that heals the humble who confess and humbles those who claim their own justice. Augustine says so of the complaint and not of Paul's hymn; the likeness between that way and the path of Christ in Philippians is the editor's.

Not even afterwards: despair, delay and perseverance

The chief priests are not blamed for having once refused John. They are blamed because, having seen the publicans and harlots believe, they "did not even afterwards repent". Chrysostom makes this the point: "For an evil thing it is not at the first to choose the good, but it is a heavier charge not even to be brought round." Nor does the precedence of the publicans reward their sins: "not, as continuing harlots, did they enter in, but having obeyed and believed, and having been purified and converted". He draws two warnings

in one sentence, “Let no man then of them that live in vice despair; let no man who lives in virtue slumber” (67.3–4). Aquinas names the worst case, *Ille enim est pessimus qui de facto suo non poenitet*, the worst is he who does not repent of what he has done, and reads the father’s “to day” *quasi per totum tempus vitae tuae*, as if through the whole time of your life.

A promise that stays open invites delay, and Augustine meets the objection in the sinner’s own words, “God hath promised me forgiveness, whenever I reform myself I am secure”. He grants the promise, “but tell me . . . who hath promised thee a to-morrow?” “‘To-morrow, To-morrow;’ is the raven’s croak” (*Sermo* 82.14), and despair and perverse hope are “the death of souls” (87.10–11). His answer comes from outside Ezekiel, from the uncertainty of life, and it is the other half of Aquinas’s “today”: the call stands for the whole of a life, and no one knows how long the life will be. Aquinas gives the open promise both its edges. With Ezekiel 18:22 as his authority he holds that no sin of a wayfarer is beyond penance, “because his will is flexible to good and evil” (*Summa theologiae* III, q. 86, a. 1); and to an objection, drawn from 18:21, that penance need not be prolonged since the penitent is forgiven at once, he answers that the penitent “must persevere in his penance, lest he fall again into sin” (q. 84, a. 8, obj. 1 and ad 1).

Jerome and Aquinas part on one consequence. Jerome says without qualification that old justices do not help the one who falls away. Aquinas, arguing from the same verse, holds that works done in charity are “deadened” by a later mortal sin and “revived by Penance”, since they remain in God’s acceptance and penance removes only the impediment on the man’s side (q. 89, aa. 4–5). Both hold that the lapsed man cannot plead his past; the difference is a development in the doctrine of merit, not a disagreement about what Ezekiel says.

The psalm prays for the same way. For Augustine it is the voice of one who “cannot by myself return, unless Thou meetest the wanderer”, and its eighth verse holds both halves of Ezekiel’s law: “The Lord is gracious, since even sinners and the ungodly He so pitied, as to forgive all that is past; but the Lord is upright too, who after the mercy of vocation and pardon, which is of grace without merit, will require merits meet for the last judgment” (*Enarrationes in Psalmos* 24.5, 8). Bellarmine reads its plea not to remember the sins of youth as a lesson in how God forgets: “God then remembers his mercy when he does not wish to remember our sins any longer” (*Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Ps 24:7). The meeting of the psalmist’s “do not remember” with Ezekiel’s “I will not remember” is the editor’s.

This first interpretation strains at two points. The parable is spoken in the temple to the chief priests and ancients about their answer to John, and Jerome, Chrysostom and Aquinas all read it first of peoples; read as a law for every person, it keeps its moral and loses the historical charge of its first telling. And Ezekiel 18 answers a people’s fatalism about inherited guilt; Jerome’s “each will be judged in that in which he is found” carries it to the last judgment, which is his extension of the oracle rather than its plain horizon.

The sheep who hear, and those who are not his sheep

Each interpretation hears the Alleluia verse at a different word. Aquinas finds four things in it. The sheep hear *credendo, et praeceptis meis obediendo*, by believing and by obeying his commands, and he joins the psalm’s warning, *Hodie si vocem eius audieritis*, “To day if you shall hear his voice” (Ps 94:8); the third thing, following, *quod est ex parte nostra, est imitatio ad Christum*, which is on our part, is the imitation of Christ, and he cites Peter, “leaving you an example that you should follow his steps” (1 Pet 2:21; *Super Ioannem* c. 10, lect. 5). The first interpretation hears in the verse the “today” of the call, and the third the following.

The second hears the verse before it, “you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep” (10:26). Augustine reads it of those addressed without distinction: “What did He mean, then, in saying to them, ‘Ye are not of my sheep’? That He saw them predestined to everlasting destruction, not won to eternal life by the price of His own blood.” His exhortation in the same passage, “be ye sheep”, is spoken to his own congregation, not to those of 10:26 (*Tractates on John* 48.4). Aquinas glosses the verse in his own terms:

not predestined to believe, *sed praesciti ad aeternum interitum*, but foreknown to eternal ruin. He then asks whether saying so drove the hearers to despair, and distinguishes. Common to that crowd was that they *non erant praeordinati a Deo ad tunc credendum*, were not preordained to believe then; particular to some was that they would believe later, as three thousand did in one day (Acts 2); and spoken to a crowd, the saying took away no one's hope, *quia nullus de se determinate hoc poterat suspicari*, since no one could suspect it of himself in particular. Both read the verse of predestination, and the difference between them is narrower than a contradiction and real: Augustine closes to those addressed the hope that Aquinas keeps open for some of them. That hope is for persons in the crowd, not for a people as such, and the second interpretation's hope for those who then refused can appeal to Aquinas and not to Augustine.

It has other witnesses. For Chrysostom, "The word, 'go before you,' is not as though these were following, but as having a hope, if they were willing. For nothing, so much as jealousy, rouses the grosser sort" (67.3). Hilary's reading keeps in view a later faith among the very men who resisted, the Pharisees who believed under the apostles. Gregory the Great hears the chapter at 10:16: the Lord came to redeem not Judaea only but the nations too, and he makes as it were one fold of two flocks, *quia Iudaicum et gentilem populum in sua fide coniungit*, because he joins the Jewish and the Gentile people in his faith, choosing the simple from each nation for eternal life (*Homiliae in Evangelia* 14.4). Gregory says nothing of 10:26. These limits are the second interpretation's strain: Hilary's reversal and the divided text show that the allegory of the peoples is a reading held by its witnesses and not the parable's plain sense, and the parable's literal addressees are the chief priests and ancients, not a people.

Word and deed: the son who went and the Son who obeyed

All three interpretations put the deed before the word. Aquinas states the comparison exactly, *Primus non promisit, sed fecit; secundus promisit, sed non fecit*, the first did not promise but did, the second promised but did not do, and the second is the worse, since it is better not to vow than to vow and not pay: *est enim ibi duplex peccatum; peccatum inobedientiae, et transgressio voti*, there is a double sin, of disobedience and of the broken promise. Chrysostom sets Paul's sentence beside the promise made at Sinai, "Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom 2:13; *Homilies on Matthew* 67.2), and he closes his homily on Philippians 2:1–4 with the same verse (*Homilies on Philippians* 5). The second Communion antiphon's own context sets word against deed, "not in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18), and Augustine says to one who claims the Christian name without its work, "Thou hast the name, and hast not the deeds" (*Homilies on the First Epistle of John* 5.12). That the second son had the name of an obedient son is the editor's join.

Paul's appeal asks for one mind and for each to count the others better than himself. Chrysostom calls vainglory "the cause of all evil" and will not let the command remain a phrase: it is kept "if thou not only sayest it, but art fully assured of it" (5). Aquinas explains how a better man can keep it honestly: *nullus est sic bonus, quin in eo sit aliquis defectus, et nullus est sic malus, quin habeat aliquid boni*, no one is so good that there is no defect in him and no one so bad that he has nothing good; and if another is wholly bad, prefer him *ratione imaginis divinae*, by reason of the divine image (*Super Philippenses* c. 2, lect. 1). Under the shorter form this appeal and the name of Christ's mind are the whole of the reading.

The longer form goes on to the hymn, and the third interpretation rests there. Chrysostom notices Paul's method, "in exhorting them to humility, he brought forward Christ", and reads "He emptied Himself" "in reference to the text, 'each counting other better than himself'"; the emptying was free, or "it would not have been an act of humility" (6–7). The obedience is a Son's: "He became obedient as a Son to His Father; He fell not thus into a servile state, but by this very act above all others guarded his wondrous Sonship, by thus greatly honoring the Father" (7). Aquinas defines the virtue: obedience is the manner of humiliation and the sign of humility, *quia proprium superbiorum est sequi propriam voluntatem*, because it is proper to the proud to follow their own will, and *tunc est obedientia magna, quando sequitur imperium alterius contra motum proprium*, obedience is great when it follows another's command against one's own inclination

(lect. 2). Augustine gives the reason the example has force: “proud man would have perished eternally, had he not been found by the lowly God”, and so “let him now, when found, imitate the Redeemer’s humility” (*Tractates on John* 55.7). Exaltation follows: “He was obedient to the uttermost, wherefore He received the honor which is on high”, Chrysostom says (7), and Aquinas calls it the reward, *exaltatio, et gloria* (lect. 3).

Christ is not only an example. Chrysostom and Aquinas both insist on it, and the hymn cannot be read as a lesson in imitation alone. Chrysostom says the equality with God was Christ’s “not by seizure, but as his own by nature” (7), and Aquinas that he did not empty himself of the divinity, *quia quod erat, permansit: et quod non erat, assumpsit*, for what he was, he remained, and what he was not, he took (lect. 2). Set beside the hymn, the two sons both fall short of the Son. One said yes and did not go; the other said no and then obeyed against his own first word, which is what Aquinas calls great obedience, though he says it of Christ and not of the son. That join is the editor’s, and the interpretation’s hold on the whole Mass rests on it, on the Collect and on the Communion antiphons, where its witnesses do speak.

The Missal’s prayers and the table

No witness cited expounds this Mass, and the places of its antiphons and orations in each interpretation are the editor’s, resting where it can on what a witness says of the text itself. Of the Entrance Antiphon’s source Jerome observes at once, *Et certe tres pueri non peccaverant*, the three young men had not sinned; they speak *ex persona populi*, in the person of the people; and from the prayer’s opening he draws a lesson for any hearer, that in distress we should confess with the whole heart that whatever befalls us we bear justly (*In Daniele*, PL 25, 509). Ildefonso Schuster calls the chant “the sorrowful confession of guilt which leads back the sinner to the way of reconciliation”, with “the implicit purpose of amendment for the future” (*The Sacramentary*, vol. 3, p. 175). In the first interpretation it is the first son’s refusal confessed; in the second, a confession spoken in the person of a people; in the third, where the longer form is read, its plea for glory to God’s name shares a word with the hymn’s “name which is above all names”, an observation about the texts.

Thomas Aquinas cites the Collect as what is said of God and gives three reasons why it is right: God freely forgives sins, which shows the highest power; by sparing and mercy he leads men *ad participationem infiniti boni*, to a share in the infinite good; and mercy is the foundation of all God’s works, since nothing is owed to anyone except on the ground of what God first gave unowed (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 25, a. 3, ad 3). Schuster says that the sinner’s restoration “requires, so to speak, a condescension and powerful energy on the part of God, such as the creation of the world itself never once called for” (*The Sacramentary*, vol. 3, pp. 121–122). The first interpretation hears Aquinas’s first reason and the third his second; that this power stoops is Schuster’s word, not Aquinas’s. In the second, the promises toward which the assembly runs are shared by those who came late, an application that is the editor’s.

The Prayer over the Offerings and the Prayer after Communion take their places by their wording alone. The plea that the offering be accepted has a counterpart in Azarias, who with no sacrifice left asked that the people be accepted “in a contrite heart and humble spirit” (Dan 3:39): heard so, the first interpretation’s offering is the turned heart, and the third’s is taken into the self-offering of the Son who obeyed unto death. The Prayer after Communion asks the repair of mind and body, which in the first is a turning begun and still needing restoration. It names its heirs by a condition, sharing Christ’s sufferings, the one Romans 8:17 sets; where the longer form is read, the third hears in it humiliation unto death and then glory, now asked for the communicants.

The first Communion antiphon is the one place where a witness joins two texts of this Mass himself. Expounding *Memento*, remember, Augustine reads it as the prayer’s desire for the promise, *hoc est, imple promissum servo tuo*, that is, fulfil your promise to your servant, and among Scripture’s ways of speaking of a God who forgets he cites *Omnes . . . iniquitates eius obliviscar*, I will forget all his iniquities, from Ezekiel 18:22 (*Enarrationes in Psalmos* 118, s. 15.1). Hilary hears in it that every word of God calls to

the hope of heavenly goods, and that hope must not be proclaimed in words only but shown *rebus ipsis*, in the things themselves (*Tractatus super Psalmos* 118, Zain 1); the second interpretation sets that hope beside the second son's "I go, Sir", a join that is the editor's. On the servant's lowliness Augustine says that hope *data est humilibus*, is given to the humble, and understands the lowliness first as humiliation suffered; Hilary too reads it as suffering endured, and says the servant knows *humilitatem suam glorioso esse honoris praemio munerendam*, that his humiliation is to be rewarded with a glorious prize of honour (s. 15.2; Zain 2). Where the longer form is read and this antiphon chosen, the servant's *humilitate* and the hymn's *humiliavit semetipsum* stand in one Mass, an observation about the words that the third interpretation takes up.

For the second antiphon Augustine is the one witness read who expounds the verse itself. He calls it the "perfection of love" and will not let it discourage the beginner: "Do not too soon despair of thyself. Haply, it is born and is not yet perfect; nourish it"; and its beginning is the brother in need, "If thou art not yet equal to the dying for thy brother, be thou even now equal to the giving of thy means to thy brother" (*Homilies on the First Epistle of John* 5.11–12). In his tractates on the Gospel he brings the verse to the altar: "what is the table of the ruler, but that from which we take the body and blood of Him who laid down His life for us? And what is it to sit thereat, but to approach in humility?" He adds at once that no martyr's blood is shed for the remission of sins as Christ's was (*Tractates on John* 84.1–2). Aquinas makes the verse Christ's example to the pastor (*Super Ioannem* c. 10, lect. 3). Gregory, on the shepherd who lays down his life, has him say *ea charitate qua pro ovibus morior quantum Patrem diligam ostendo*, by the charity with which I die for the sheep I show how much I love the Father, and goes on at once to the one fold (14.4); he says it of John 10, and its use at an antiphon from John's letter is the editor's. The first interpretation hears the charity begun in deeds, the second the one fold, the third the life laid down and received at the ruler's table.

Where the three interpretations agree and part

All three hear God's way as mercy that is also just, and all three put the deed before the word: the son who went, the people who obeyed in works, the Son who obeyed unto death. The first two rest on the Lectionary's one official correlation, which the *Ordo*'s titles place on repentance, and they are complementary. Jerome gives both in his commentary on Ezekiel 18, the principle at vv. 21–25 and the peoples at vv. 26–31, and reports the personal reading of the parable beside his own. The second keeps what the first loses, the parable's first telling to men who would not believe John; the first keeps what the second cannot say alone, that the parable's law binds every hearer, including those who count themselves the first son. The third differs in kind. It reads the formulary from the second reading and the Communion antiphons and reaches the correlated readings only through Augustine on the complaint and the editor's joining; under the shorter form it holds only in part.

The literal sense is common ground, and the allegorical sense is where they part. For the first, the father is God, who calls by an inward inspiration through the "today" of a whole life (Aquinas, on Matthew), and the penitent is received into the flock (Jerome, on Ezekiel); that Christ is the voice calling that today, and that God's power in forgiving receives him, are the editor's joins. For the second, the sons are the nations and the people of Sinai (Jerome, Chrysostom, Aquinas), with Hilary's reversal beside them. For the third, in the longer form, Christ is the Son who obeyed and so honoured the Father (Chrysostom) and the lowly God who found proud man (Augustine). The moral senses follow: neither despair nor slumber, and turn today; the baptized can become the second son, and those long inside the vineyard are not to resent those who come late and must themselves go; count others better and, in the longer form, obey against your own inclination; with the second Communion antiphon, begin by giving to a brother in need. The anagogical senses differ in what they await: the judgment that finds each where he is found, with merits required at the end (Jerome; Augustine on the psalm); election from each nation for eternal life (Gregory) and, in the longer form, every knee bowing; exaltation after humility (Hilary, where the first antiphon is chosen; Aquinas, in the longer form), and a share as fellow heirs in the glory of him whose death is proclaimed.

Three real disputes cross these lines. Hilary reverses the sons on a text whose answer named the younger, and Jerome, who knew that answer, preferred the copies that named the first; this touches the second interpretation directly and the first only at its edge. Augustine and Aquinas both read John 10:26 of predestination, but Augustine leaves those addressed no opening and Aquinas finds among them some who were to believe later. Jerome and Aquinas differ on whether the good works of one who falls away help him when he returns, a development of doctrine and not a quarrel about Ezekiel. Whichever son the hearer finds himself to be, the Mass gives him the same confession, the same prayer for the way and the same Communion.

Appendix: Scope and Qualifications

Edition, formulary and occurrence. This concise study treats the Mass of the Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, as the *Roman Missal*, Third Edition, and the *Lectionary for Mass*, no. 136, give it for the dioceses of the United States, in the national calendar alone, for the occurrence of 27 September 2026. The antiphons and orations serve Years A, B and C; the readings, psalm and Alleluia verse are Year A's. Both forms of the second reading and both Communion antiphons are treated, and nothing that rests on Philippians 2:6–11 holds for a celebration that uses the shorter form.

Relation to the expansive study. Every claim here is drawn from the canonical study of this same formulary and its research records; the study prints the appointed Scripture, sets each element in its literary and textual setting, and develops the three interpretations at length, each with its own literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical senses and its own difficulties; nothing evidence-dependent is added. The four rows on the first page orient a reader and do not replace those distillations. The second page condenses the study's dossier, printing the Date cells with their relation labels, alternatives and unresolved states exactly as the generated chronology record gives them.

Text and English. The Missal formulary was read for the study in the Latin of the *Missale Romanum*, editio typica tertia (2002), in a digitally typeset reproduction; no United States altar book was inspected, so the approved English orations were not read in any witness, and which Latin text the Entrance Antiphon's wording follows is not established. The Lectionary's boundaries rest on the national calendar for 2026, the bishops' conference's dated page of readings and no. 136 of the Latin *Ordo lectionum Missae* (1981); the printed United States Lectionary was not inspected, and two questions remain open: whether the United States strophe includes the last clause of Psalm 25:5, and whether another Alleluia verse from a common set may replace John 10:27. The order of the sons and the answer of Matthew 21:29–31 differ among the witnesses to the text; the Lectionary's, as that dated page gives it, has the father go first to the son who refuses and afterwards goes and the hearers name the first. No manuscript was examined. All Scripture is quoted in the Douay–Rheims version as revised by Bishop Challoner, a public-domain study translation of the Clementine Vulgate. It is not the text proclaimed in the celebration: the controlling English is that of the *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America* and, for the antiphons and orations, that of the *Roman Missal*, Third Edition, neither of which is reproduced. The orations and the two antiphons that adapt Scripture are identified by Latin incipit and described; the descriptions are not translations and may not be quoted as the texts' words. English glosses of Latin passages are the editor's renderings of the Latin printed beside them.

Reception and its limits. The witnesses named are those the study's bounded search read at the loci in the References. Chrysostom, Augustine's sermons, his tractates on John and on the First Epistle of John, and his expositions of Psalms 17 and 24 were read in the English of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers; Aquinas's *Summa* III in the English Dominican translation; Bellarmine in O'Sullivan's abridged English of 1866, the Latin not compared; Schuster in a text layer of the 1927 English. Jerome, Hilary, Augustine on Psalm 118, and Aquinas on Matthew, John and Philippians and in *Summa* I, q. 25 were read on page images of the printings named, and Gregory in an electronic Latin text. No witness was collated with a modern critical edition. Nothing is said here about who first proposed any reading, about any reading being the Fathers' common view, or about the order in time or the mutual dependence of the witnesses. No exposition of the parable of the two sons by Augustine was found in the texts of his searched, and no commentary on the Prayer over the Offerings or the Prayer after Communion was found.

Relations among the elements. The liturgical books state three relations: the first reading is chosen in relation to the Gospel (*Praenotanda* 106), the psalm responds to the first reading, and the acclamation greets the Gospel (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 61, 62). The second reading and the Gospel each belong to a semi-continuous course, and the recurrence of the words for way, for remembering and for humility across the texts is an observation about their wording. One witness cited joins two of the Mass's texts himself: Augustine cites Ezekiel 18:22 in expounding Psalm 118:49. Every other connection drawn between one element and another is the editor's synthesis, grounded in a witness's statement about his own passage where one is cited and otherwise resting on the wording of the texts. No witness cited comments on this Mass.

The Council's declaration. *Nostra aetate* 4 was read in the English of the Holy See's website, its Latin not compared. It is cited as the Church's teaching on how the identification of the two sons with two peoples is presented, not as a judgment on the exegesis of any Father.

Chronology, rights and records. The Date cells print the shared chronology corpus's answers with their relations and alternatives unchanged. The first reading's answers date the captivity and Ezekiel's ministry, not the oracle of chapter 18, and the page of Haydock behind the A.M. figure was not read. The Entrance Antiphon's composition answer is one author's

judgment on the Greek additions to Daniel, beside the contrary view he reports. The Psalter’s common bound is not a date for either psalm, and the Gospel’s and the Johannine answers are composition dates of the books. The Douay–Rheims, the Clementine Vulgate, the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, O’Sullivan’s Bellarmine, the English Dominican *Summa*, the volumes of Migne, the Vienna Hilary, the Venice and Liège printings of Aquinas, Schuster’s English and the *Catholic Encyclopedia* are in the public domain; Gregory’s Latin is quoted in short phrases from a licensed electronic edition, and the Leonine *Summa*, whose rights are unresolved, in one short passage. The Missal, the *Ordo*, the Lectionary, the *General Instruction*, the national calendar, *Nostra aetate* in English and the introduction to the Psalms of the New American Bible are protected and are cited, with only incipits, the three titles of the *Ordo* and short phrases of the Council’s declaration quoted. The audits are `propers/verified.md`, `research/scope.md`, `research/interpretations.md` and, for this companion’s production, `research/production-review.md`.

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