

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Just Do It, Jelly Belly Kelly

A Father asked his two sons to work in his vineyard. One said, "I will not go," but did. The other said, "I'll go," but didn't. . Who did the will of the Father?

Today's gospel about the sons who say one thing and then do another, reminds me of a story about Jelly Belly Kelly. Now, don't laugh. This is a true story about a real friend of mine who passed away last December. Actually, he was a priest up North, Fr. Frank Kelly, SDB. Fr. Frank was a great person and a great priest. He is also a large person and a large priest. In fact, he was sort of spherical, about 5'8" by 5'8". When Fr. Frank laughed, he laughed from the bottom of his immense stomach, a real HO HO HO. And Fr. Frank always laughed. And the world laughed with him.

Anyway, a very long time when I was a seminarian I spent a summer at Don Bosco High School in Ramsey, New Jersey with good old Jelly Belly Kelly and some of his priest friends. Now Fr. Frank's friends were concerned that his weight was just not healthy. Fr. Frank knew he should do something about his weight. He also knew that he liked to eat. But his friends kept on him, badgering him to go with them to Weight Watchers. They finally convinced him when they showed him an advertisement that said, "Lose weight while you eat." So, Fr. Frank went to his first meeting. Now, I'm not all that sure what happens in those meetings, but I have the impression that people get up and say how terrible it is for them to be so overweight and to let food dominate their lives. Food became more important than relationships. Food became more important than their health. This was all serious stuff--to everyone, except good old Jelly Belly Kelly. He got the giggles. The entire meeting, Fr. Frank sat there and laughed his HO HO HO. His friends were embarrassed. At the end of the meeting, one of the leaders came up to Fr. Frank and told him that he shouldn't come back if he wasn't going to be serious about this.

This did not leave an impression upon Fr. Frank. When he got back to the living quarters by the school, he found me in the TV room and asked me if I'd like to go for a ride with him. The ride brought us to a brand new Friendly's Ice Cream Parlor. I don't know if they have Friendly's where you live, but I have to tell you that Friendly's makes seriously good ice cream. For those of you who have grown up with Frosties, trust me, you haven't had a milkshake until you have had an Aweful Aweful. Anyway, Fr. Frank felt obligated to show the support of the Church. So we went and had huge banana splits. Then, as we were about to leave, he asked the waitress for a double dip cone for his poor dear mother who really enjoyed good ice cream. When we got to the parking lot, Frank said, "Oh well, Mother lives fifty miles from here. It'll melt before I get it to her," and down went the cone.

The next week, Fr. Frank's friends offered to take him back to the Weight Watchers meeting if he promised to behave. He said he would. At the weigh-in, he was the only person who gained weight. But he said that he had turned over a new leaf. He would be serious about losing weight now. Then on the way home he said to his friends, "Hey, have you guys been to that new Friendly's yet?" Jelly Belly Kelly.

Why did Fr. Frank even bother to go to Weight Watchers? Probably because he knew he should do something about his weight, even if he wasn't committed to doing much about it. Actually, he was something like the second fellow in the gospel reading who knew that he should listen to his father, and said he would, but really wasn't committed to doing what his father wanted him to do. Or maybe he just wanted to flatter his father, saying what the father wanted to hear, but doing nothing about it.

All of us have got a lot of Jelly Belly Kelly in us and a lot of that second son in us. Perhaps we intend to do what God calls us to do, but we just keep putting it off, never getting around to it. There is an old saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. So we know that we need to stop a relationship before it destroys our lives, but we wait until it is too late and a spouse finds out about a special friend who is more than a friend. Or we know that we need to just cut off from something that ends up controlling us, drink, drugs, gambling, porn or whatever, but we keep putting it off until our addiction destroys those around us. Perhaps we need to get help, but we don't. Perhaps, we need to remember the line from the old Nike commercials and "Just Do It."

Or maybe like the two evil sisters in Shakespear's *King Lear*, Goneril and Regan, we just say what their father the king wanted to hear. King Lear had said that he would divide his kingdom up to his three daughters according to how much they loved him. Goneril and Regan told him how wonderful he was in flowing terms, but they didn't believe it. When their father began to lose his mind, they wanted to destroy him, not love him in his weakness. The third daughter, Cordelia, would not flatter her father and thus received nothing, but she was the one supporting him when he needed her. We go to Mass and are given the spiritual motivation to live out our Christianity for another week, just as the Weight Watchers meeting provides the motivation to carry out the job of losing weight for another week. But just like good old Jelly Belly Kelly, often when we step outside the Church we ignore the things we know we need to do to really live as true Christians.

That's why the Lord says in today's gospel that his true followers are not those who make promises but don't keep them, like the Pharisees and Temple leaders. His true followers are those who work hard in his Father's vineyard. Tax collectors and prostitutes were doing this. They were pleasing to God.

We are called to work in the Father's vineyard. Do we even know where that vineyard is? The vineyard is your life and my life. The vineyard is your house and my house. In the vineyard are those who reach out to us, seeking the love of Christ in us. In the vineyard are those we may not know but who need to find Christ within us.

With the Grace of God, we can do the work of God. But it is work, and work is hard. Work takes time and strength. Work means tackling that addiction. Work means doing everything we can to stay away from all that could hurt us and through us hurt others. Work means learning how to control that temper. Work means making a

serious effort to be understanding of your husband or wife, your children. Work means making a concentrated effort to be spiritual.

The two sons were called to labor in the vineyard. They were not called to rest in the shade. We have been called to the vineyard. We have been called to do the work of God.

Jelly Belly Kelly was not committed to losing weight. His attendance at Weight Watchers was a waste of time. How about us here? The readings call each of us to ask ourselves: Am I really committed to living this all surpassing gift that is my Christianity? Today, we ask God to give us the strength and the courage to do His Work.