

Homily based on the readings from September 17, 2025 (1 Timothy 3.14-16; Luke 7.31-35)

Human beings have a remarkable capacity for rationalizing bad behavior. Regardless of whether we want to *do* something or whether we want to *avoid* doing it, we can almost certainly invent an excuse that we pretend to find believable. Today's Gospel reading illustrates exactly this type of situation:

For John the Baptist came neither eating food nor drinking wine, and you said, "He is possessed by a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you said, "Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."

As the saying goes, "heads I win, tails you lose." The point, of course, is that Christ's contemporaries were not going to trouble themselves by following *any* prophet or religious figure – regardless of what he did or did not do, regardless of what he said or did not say. The details were simply a pretext for arriving at a predetermined outcome.

It is a sad truth that human nature has not changed much over the past two thousand years. We encounter this kind of reasoning all the time, particularly in reference to the widespread religious apathy of our day. I am sure we have all heard the justifications people give for not coming to Mass: the homilies are too short or the homilies are too long; the music is too modern or the music is too old fashioned; the liturgy is boring and repetitive or the liturgy is confusing and unfamiliar. To be fair, there *are* some people who raise legitimate concerns – particularly relating to instances of clerical abuse. Nevertheless, the conclusion is always the same. Nobody ever comes up with a convenient excuse to participate more fully in the sacramental life of the Church. People always find a cheap and easy reason to walk away.

If we are being honest with ourselves, though, we have to acknowledge that all of us are guilty of this sort of behavior – in one form or another, at some point in our lives. God asks us to make sacrifices and commitments all the time – sometimes tiny and apparently insignificant, sometimes tremendous and obviously life-changing. Perhaps God wants

us to volunteer at a soup kitchen or to teach faith formation. Perhaps he wants us to pursue a vocation to ordained ministry or to the religious life. Whatever action God is calling us to take, we are capable of devising a *dozen* different excuses for doing the exact opposite. The challenge we face is giving heed to *his* voice – rather than our own. Many wise and learned saints – including Saint Robert Bellarmine, whom we commemorate today – have written lengthy treatises to assist the faithful in discerning God’s will. While such works are certainly worthy of our attention, sometimes it is helpful to focus on a single, simple principle: seek out the activities that appear right and wholesome, but which our first reaction is to avoid. If our subconscious is rebelling against something that is obviously consistent with God’s will, then that is exactly what we ought to be doing. God never calls anyone to anything that is safe or convenient. He always asks us to stretch ourselves, to make the most of the talents with which he has entrusted us. In the end, that is the only way to liberate ourselves from the prison of our own desires, to walk free with Jesus as his faithful disciples.