

## **25TH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A**

*Isaiah 5: 6-9 + Psalm 145 + Philippians 1: 2-24, 27 + Matthew 20: 1-6*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: September 20, 2020

In last Sunday's Gospel we were invited with Peter to think as God does about forgiveness.

Instead of thinking as humans do about forgiveness, that there is only a limited amount of forgiveness to share, we were invited to learn about the limitless forgiveness offered us by God through his Son.

The wages paid by Christ Jesus by the shedding of his blood for us is a debt we can never repay, but a gift of unending forgiveness we can only receive and then give away.

This Sunday we are invited deeper into the mystery of God, and learn once again that God's ways are not our ways, nor are God's thoughts like our own.

Our limited sense of justice, our human ways of competing and comparing, are all challenged by the parable of the generous landowner.

In this parable, as in all the parables of Jesus, he is shaking up our human held assumptions in order to draw us into the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is different from the human kingdoms of this world. It is not a place, but rather a way of thinking and loving as the King of Kings does. The Kingdom of God is living with the King and as his servants, imitating his justice.

The parable invites us to shift our focus from what I have done to what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

We are challenged to "grow up"---to stop crying out "not fair"—and to instead rejoice in the generosity of God who gives us the best gift of all---His Son.

The cry of the first workers upon seeing the ones who worked only a short while and are paid the same is the first: "You have made them equal to us."

This is the way human minds think that are not transformed into the mind of Christ. Thinking that I am better than others, that I am more deserving, because I earned it by what I have done.

This focus on the self—what I have done—is the danger of individualism in our culture. When the focus is inward---on me—we have taken our eyes off the source of life, the one who owns not only the vineyard but to whom everything belongs.

What is ironic about the childish cry, “You have made them equal to us” is that out of love for humankind, God made himself equal to us. The one who was equal to God, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Divine Trinity, emptied himself of all divine privilege to become one of us. The God who Jesus reveals is not a God who is fair, but a God who is generous. Who keeps inviting us into the vineyard, who loves each of us equally, with a love that cannot be measured or even quantified.

The Gospel can never be equated with the “American Dream.” Nowhere does Jesus teach that hard work is the way to live in his kingdom. Pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps and making a fortune out of blood, sweat, and tears is not the Gospel message at all.

In fact, life in the Kingdom of God is not able to be earned, it is never deserved, it is pure gift by the generosity of God. When we shift the focus from what we as individuals have done to what God has done in Christ and what God continues to do through the power of the Spirit, we are able to work joyfully in the vineyard of the Kingdom

Then there is another way that we humans think which is nothing like the thoughts of God. We look at what others have been given and we want what they have, not able to be grateful for all that we have been given.

The question of the landowner at the end of the parable zeroes in on the danger of envy. “Are you envious because I am generous?” A more literal translation would be: “Is your eye evil because I am good?”

The deadly sin of envy---looking at what others have and wanting THAT instead of being grateful for all we have been given—causes our view of God to be distorted.

Comparison and competition, which are so encouraged in the Kingdom of America, further heighten this sin of envy.

We think there is a scarcity of everything, so we compete for the little there is. We think that winning is everything, so we compete to be better than others. We think there is not enough happiness to go around, so we feel diminished when someone else, who did not work as hard as we did, is blessed.

Comparing, competing, seeking to be first---all of this causes us to focus on others. When we shift our focus to the God revealed to us by Jesus Christ, we think and live in a new way.

We are free to be last and the servant of all, because that is the way to true joy. We feel no need to enter the frenzy of competing for the stuff of this world, because we know there is more than enough to go around. We enter deeper and deeper into an attitude of gratitude for simply being given the privilege to work in the vineyard of the Kingdom of God.

This parable challenges you and me on so many levels. We are invited to put on the mind of Christ, to think as God does. When we do, we see clearly that looking out only for me and my interests and the interests of my own group has nothing to do with the Kingdom of God.

Rather, the Lord of the Vineyard seeks us out today to invite us yet again into service in his kingdom, where separateness and being number one and winning is not the goal. Rather, unity is the goal---unity with the Lord and communion with others who are working in the vineyard. Together working for the common good, so that every single person may know their dignity as equals in the Kingdom, every single one made in the image of a Generous and Merciful God.

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