

Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

IS 55:6-9

PHIL 1:20c-24,27a

MT 20:1-16

“Are you envious because I am generous?”

This is a difficult question to answer. It’s kinda tricky. The landowner asks it of the workers who were employed all day in his vineyard and received what they were promised but it was the same amount as those who worked much less. On one hand, they should be grateful that they got the usual daily wage but, on the other hand, they might be disappointed because they had to work a whole day in order to get it! Perhaps they wanted to ask the landowner, “Why did your generosity not extend to us? Why didn’t we get more for the hours we worked just like the others did?”

The problem with this parable is that we tend to focus on the workers who got what they were promised and nothing more and claim that it was unfair rather than focusing on the workers who got what they didn’t deserve or earned. Perhaps it’s because we think of ourselves as people who are often left out, ignored or think that others get treated better than we do. We are afflicted with that “grass is always greener on the other side” complex. Too often we compare ourselves to others instead of being happy with what we have and using what we have to the best of our abilities. Perhaps we feel entitled to certain things and we get upset when we don’t get what we think we deserve. The only solution I know to this problem is to learn to be happy with what we have been given because everything we have been given is a gift from God. Using our gifts and expecting nothing in return when we use them is an act of charity, which is the highest form of love. We need to resist the temptation to act like we are entitled to certain things and work for what we want instead of expecting someone else to just give it to us.

But let’s face it, there is a part of us that loves getting something for nothing. Be honest. It’s a great feeling to get more than what we expect or deserve. We all enjoy an unexpected surprise when it’s in our favor—the bonus we didn’t plan for, the friend who picks up the dinner tab, and the gift that somebody gives us for no particular reason.

This parable is not about equality in the workplace. Nor is it not about equal pay for equal work. The workers got what was promised them—fair and square. It’s the other workers who got more that reveal the essence of this parable about our relationship with God. He is the landowner and we are the workers who didn’t work a full day and yet were given a full day’s wage. God sent his only begotten Son into the world to be our Savior. He suffered, died and rose from the dead for our salvation. We did nothing to earn it. We did nothing to deserve it. It was pure gift. “God proves his love for us in that while

we were still sinners Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). Once we recognize his generosity then we are filled not with envy but with gratitude.

We all love to get something for nothing. My brothers and sisters, **His love is the greatest something we’ve ever received for doing absolutely nothing!** So, let us be grateful, let us acknowledge this gift that we didn’t deserve and let it be our motivation to spend our lives paying it back by giving everything we have, including ourselves, to God whose generosity is never ending!

*Very Rev. William L. Novak, V.G.
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