

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - "We must transform our love for God into living action."

September 20, 2020

"The last will be first, and the first will be last." Christ tells this parable in this Sunday's Gospel reading (Matthew 20:1-16A) right after Peter asked, **"Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"** (Matthew 19:27). The parable of the workers in the vineyard is rather startling. People are paid the same no matter how long they worked. What is God thinking? We think of justice in terms of what is fair and what people deserve. So we would say that the people who work longer deserve more. But God doesn't see it that way. God thinks of justice in terms of people's dignity, their right to a decent life. The people who came late had the same right to a decent life as those who had worked all day, so they were all treated equally. Nothing is taken from anyone, but all are treated in accord with their dignity, their right to a decent life. Just as the first workers found that the latecomers were treated with extra generosity. The parable is a warning to the Apostles. They too were given a special role in the history of salvation. They were chosen to be the visible foundation of the Church, but in the end, others will achieve greatness in Christ's name as well - **The first will be last. God has plans that we do not always understand.**

As parents, we know sibling rivalry occurs often, especially when the children are young. Sometimes it even continues into adulthood: **"Mom always liked you best."** It is as though the children feel there isn't enough love or attention or approval to go around, and so they must constantly compete for their fair share. What's true in children and society in general is also true in our lives today. You and I are treated unfairly all the time. And so we simplify reply to our children, **"Life isn't fair."** Or is it? Jesus tries to tell us what is fair and just is established by God, not by our standards of merit. What is being discussed, as usual, is God's kingdom – life lived under the reign of God – a God whose generosity offends us and baffles us. But the good news is that God's grace is so great and so surprising that it can provide enough for everyone no matter how late in the day it is – after repeated failures, in the jail cell, in the deathbed.... because the recipient need not add anything to the grace, but simply receive it in order for it to do its life-sustaining work. Even as the sun sets on this life, it is not too late to accept God's **Amazing Grace.** And it is never too soon for the rest of us to begin to consider that heaven is "enough," **heaven's daily wage makes all earthly comparisons look meaningless and silly.**

As the first reading (Isaiah 55:6-9) puts it, **"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways."** Why does Jesus issue this warning? Because he wants us to have interior peace. Nothing disturbs our minds more than the thirst for recognition and esteem. When we are always comparing ourselves to others, we are filled with worries, envy, stress, anger, and uncertainty. And this can occur even within our own Christian communities! But if we simply try to give our best in life for Christ, thinking more of the glory of God than of self, and recognizing the abundant generosity of God's love, then our trust in him will grow, selfish motives will shrink, and we will begin to experience **the unshakable peace and security that only Christ can save.**

What makes the saints so remarkable is that they are brilliant reflections of God's extraordinary generosity. They, like the landowner in the parable, like our Lord himself, give without counting the cost. Like the sun, they shine forth God's goodness tirelessly, in their words and deeds, because they themselves are constantly being filled with that same goodness. Mother Teresa of Calcutta was an eloquent example of this. When she visited the many convents that she had founded, even though she was the Superior General of the Order, she had a habit of getting up early on the last day of her visit (early being 4:00am or so), and washing the convent's bathrooms before the rest of the nuns woke up.

Fr Sebastian Vahakala, a priest connected to her Order, explains how he learned Christian generosity from her: "One day I was working at the home for the dying in Kalighat, Calcutta. The Corporation Ambulance brought in a man. I looked at him and recognized him straightaway, as he had been to our home several times. So I told Blessed Teresa that there was no sense in taking him in again, as he would go out when he might feel a little better (he was taking advantage of their generosity). Blessed Teresa looked at me and said: 'Brother Sebastian, does this man need your help now or not? It does not matter that he was here yesterday or not, or that he is going to come back again tomorrow. **We do not have yesterday any more, nor do we have tomorrow yet; all that we have is today to love God and serve the poor.**" That's just a little glimpse of the kind of supernatural generosity that continuously overflows from God's heart, towards each and every one of us.

God's generosity truly is beyond comprehension. And yet, one of its most remarkable manifestations is often overlooked. The landowner in the parable gave those workers real work to do in his vineyard, even if the reward far outweighed the actual amount of work. Christ does the same with us. He allows us to make a real contribution to the eternal happiness for ourselves and our neighbours through loving him, serving others, and building up the Church. **We are members of his Mystical Body; we are his hands, feet, eyes, and mouth. When we serve those around us, we are serving Christ and storing up an eternal treasure in heaven. When we stay faithful to Christian principles even under pressure, humiliation, and persecution, we are glorifying God and adding to our heavenly reward.** When we help others come closer to Christ through our words, prayers, and example, we are increasing the everlasting joy of heaven for them and for us. This is the privilege Christ has generously given us by making us his fellow workers in God's Kingdom. It is not enough to simply have "feelings" of love when walking with God. It is necessary to go beyond feeling and words. In our actions of true kindness and generosity, we can heal wounds, feed the weak, and give hope to the desperate. It is in actions that the greatness of God's love can overflow in my heart and infect those around me. To love God is to act concretely on behalf of those in need. Today, let's thank him for it, and let's promise that we'll do our best to live up to it and let's first start in our own family.

Lord, by your grace, we will be attentive to the needs of those around us, not hesitating to show interest, concern, and compassion for each person we encounter. We will not calculate or measure the effort we have to take. As one of the famous quotes from St.. Teresa of Calcutta, **"We must transform our love for God into living action."**

(Suggested reading. 1 Corinthians 12:31 - 13:13)