

25th (QA&SJ) Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord,” What Isaiah declares in today’s first reading, Jesus puts in a parable found only in Matthew. This is one of the few parables of Jesus that still has the capacity to enrage the hearer. Jesus perfected his own brand of storytelling, *the parable*, to communicate his teachings. *Search through the Gospels and you’ll see that He never used statistics to make a point.* The parables were so well-crafted they still can shake us up and make us think. The aim is to get us to look at ourselves and to examine the reaction that takes place in our own hearts. We get confused only when we fail to focus on its theme.

Today’s Gospel about laborers in the vineyard is a significant example. It calls our attention to the parable’s setting in a time of high unemployment. On first hearing we may be inclined to share the reaction of the grumbling all-day workers who felt unjustly treated when the latecomers received the same pay. *Indeed it takes up the question of what is just and fair. “I will give you what is just.”* The landowner commits no injustice by fulfilling his contract. The workers accept the landowner’s offer of what is just, but when that just wage is paid to them they complained because the owner paid the same amount to those who worked but a short time. Indeed the landowner is benevolent and kind to his workers. *“Are you envious because I am generous?”* Since he possesses the land the owner is free to decide for his property. This is

not about equal pay or legal wage but about an employer who wants to be generous to all.

People may be unkind and ungrateful. *So what?* That does not mean we should act like them. We can decide to be generous like the Lord and believe that kindness will pay in the end. *A company was forced to lay off workers because of the bad economy. Some of the employees who were retained lamented how pitiful the laid off workers were. So the owner told the complaining employees, "If you really care for them, I propose that we cut your salaries in half to rehire and pay your former co-workers." The employees replied, "Oh, maybe they will find other jobs."*

"Are you envious because I am generous?" In today's lingo, Jesus might say, *"You just don't get it."* For the thrust of His message points to the owner of the vineyard, who represents a merciful God, refusing to be boxed in by the strict accounting standards of the people whose lives run smoothly! While we work *on compensation and reward, on input and output*, God is *pure mercy and goodness*. That is God's nature, as the parable illustrated: *generous, full of grace, mercy and compassion* who welcomes the *'latecomers'* into His Kingdom. *"The last shall be first and the first shall be the last."* This reversal provides a transition from the story of the young man and Peter's question about the disciple's own role in the kingdom of heaven. The reversal also

challenges us to examine our own notions of justice. *Are we constantly asserting our rights before God, appealing to his justice?*

St. Augustine is an outstanding latecomer. He wrote in his Confessions. *“Too late have I loved you, O beauty, ever old, ever new—too late have I loved you.”* To receive our Lord’s favors, the secret is to throw away the account books and depend on His kindness. The story also speaks of our basic tendency to be envious and to compare ourselves with others. *“And on receiving their wage they grumbled against the landowner, ‘we worked the whole day under the scorching sun and you paid them equal to us?’”* A line from the poem Desiderata puts it, *“If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be lesser or greater persons than yourself”* *Have you ever found yourself resenting the good fortunes of others? Do not fall into the trap of being eaten up by envy and its first cousin, jealousy. Do not give in to this fruitless pastime which will make you exhausted, miserable and unhappy. If you have fallen into the trap ask the Lord beg him to unleash you from this prison and set you free. The issue is not what the neighbor has, but what you have! Set yourself free by focusing not, on what you don’t have, but on what you already have. Don’t go through life focused on the could-have-beens and the should-have-beens. Focus on your gifts; count your blessings, not what is missing. Count not your woes but your wows!* If you look hard enough, you will see that there are more reasons to give thanks than to complain.

Yes, we must focus on what we already have in life. *When will you stop complaining and comparing and start living and giving?* God's ways are different from our own: gracious and good to all. *Our belonging to the kingdom is not a matter of being first or last, but a question of responding to the Lord's call and using the gifts and opportunities given us. **When gratitude fills our hearts, there is no space or reason to compare or complain. Accept and live Jesus' word and you will be granted an equal share in God's kingdom. Amen!***