

Homily of Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2023

Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18; Philippians 1:20-24, 27; Matthew 20:1-16

In the first reading, Prophet Isaiah tells us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor his ways our ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts. St. Paul says, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God" (1 Corinthians 3:19).

Jesus' parables are said to be earthly stories with heavenly meanings. The parable in today's gospel is full of heavenly meanings and goes against the wisdom of this world. In the parable, those who worked all day received the same wage as those who worked for a few hours and those who worked for only one hour. Judging from human wisdom and standards, the landowner acted unfairly by paying all the workers the same amount.

However, Jesus did not tell this parable to teach employers how to pay workers. With this parable, Jesus taught the lawyers, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the priests that although the Gentiles received the message of salvation later than the Jews, the Gentiles would have equal share in the Kingdom of God. Salvation and heaven are not classed.

Before and during the time of Jesus, the lawyers, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the priests had entitlement mentality. In our time, there are places where some people, due to their entitlement mentality, deny others their rights and privileges. There are places where some people, due to their entitlement mentality, render others as nobodies. Jesus says in Matthew 5:22, "Whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into fiery hell." St. Paul tells us in the second reading, "Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). The way of the gospel of Christ is as St. Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Jesus prays for us in John 17:21, "I pray that they may be one..."

A song by Marty Haugen titled "*All are Welcome*" says,

*Let us build a house
where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.*

*Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ
shall end divisions.
All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Countries, races, institutions, religions, organizations, communities, families, and we all in one way or another are guilty since exclusions, exceptions, and exemptions exist everywhere. Exclusions, exceptions, and exemptions that demean or cause suffering or endanger life is sinful.

The parable in today's gospel is one of the biblical explanations why the Catholic Church performs the Last Rite (the Sacrament of Extreme Unction) on those in danger of death or the dying in the hope of the individuals' repentance and God's forgiveness of their sins and be welcomed into his kingdom. The dying thief crucified by the side of Jesus received forgiveness and was welcomed into paradise (Luke 23:43).

Jesus concludes his instruction in today's gospel with the following words, "The last will be the first, and the first will be the last." This reminds me of a boxing tournament where the boxer who had only 50 points knocked out his opponent who had 150 points within the last twenty seconds of the fight. There are many instances like this. The unemployed men who stood at the marketplace did not walk away in disappointment. They remained until 5:00 PM! Their perseverance, patience, waiting, and hoping paid off!

Therefore, be patient. Persevere. Keep hoping. Keep fighting. Keep trying. Keep praying. Do not give up. Do not walk away in disappointment. You may become a winner within the last twenty seconds. You may be visited by the Lord, the Landowner, at the nick of time. All we need to do is wait for Him! (Isaiah 40:31).

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