



Blessed Sacrament Parish
Homily by Father Chris Comerford
September 24, 2017 Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I Isaiah 55:6-9

Psalm 145:2-18

Reading II Philippians 1:20-27

Gospel Luke 8:4-15

Homily

While hearing this parable, it made me think of an image of the sports world. There are players who sign huge multi-million-dollar contracts. Then a year or two later they see someone else has signed a contract who is getting more per year than they are. So what do they want to do? Renegotiate their contract. And if they can't do that, what do they do? They hold out. They don't play. Oh, that makes me mad when I hear that! And I think, "Look. You are under contract. You signed the contract." But they have an idea about what is fair. And we all do the same thing, and that is why Jesus is addressing this parable for us about the Kingdom, and how we are all called be workers in the vineyard of the poor.

It is a good parable. We see what happens. This vineyard owner goes into the center of town to the market and hires workers for the day. That is how they did it. They were hourly workers and were hired to work day by day depending on if there was work to be done. And there was the usual wage that you were paid. If you worked, you got paid. If you didn't work that day you probably did not have enough money to provide things for your family. So, it is early in the morning and the owner goes out and hires men for the vineyard, and then does it again at other times of the day — even late in the afternoon around 5 p.m. when there is probably just an hour's work left in the day. He goes into town and there are still people at the market who were never hired. We don't know the reason. At least they had not gone home and were holding out some hope they might be hired. The vineyard owner hires a few of these men. Remember, they are all getting paid the daily wage.

So, at the end of the day when it is time to pay everyone, the owner starts with the last ones hired and gives them the full-days wage. That's pretty good for an hour of work! In fact, he is giving the same wage to all the workers. And the first ones hired figured, "Well, we are going to get a bonus. We worked longer and harder." But the vineyard owner doesn't do this. And the workers say, "It's not fair." We often say the same thing about our lives. "It's not fair." I think that is why Jesus is addressing these things for us. It reflects how God's mercy and his generosity is not about being equal, but is his way of offering the great gift. The challenge is that sometimes we take these earthly images and apply them to the reality of God and heavenly realities. And you see what happens. It doesn't work.

God told Isaiah today, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, and my ways are not your ways.” It is hard for us to see and to think as God does. This parable is addressed especially to the people of Israel. They were the first-born, they were the chosen ones, they were the first. And they thought the others were not going to matter — such as the Gentiles. They thought, “Those Gentiles are not important.” But the message is that God invites everyone to be part of his Kingdom. And even though you are not first, you are still invited to be part of God’s Kingdom.

This is important because sometimes as workers in the Kingdom, and as disciples, we think we earn God’s love and respect. We think, “God owes me for what I have done for him.” That is a dangerous position to hold because we do not earn anything. No. It is a gift. It has been given freely by God. We haven’t earned it. We don’t work for our salvation. God’s doesn’t punch our ticket and eventually he will let us into heaven. That is not how it works. It is a free gift of his generosity and love. And the message here is that people are invited all along the way. Even at the end. And this is hard when we see people who we know have not lived the best life. And all of a sudden, as they get near death, they convert. Deathbed conversion and repentance. It is sometimes easy to say, “That’s not fair. I follow the rules. Here’s this person. He has all the fun and he is going to get the same thing I am. That’s not fair.”

We have to be careful not to have that attitude and we need to realize that God’s gifts are freely given as he desires. His mercy is so great, even for the worst of sinners who are invited into mercy even at the last minute. It is important for us to continue to invite people. I have had so many people say, “Oh, God wouldn’t want me. I’ve done too much wrong. He wouldn’t want me. I don’t deserve it.” It’s not true. He invites all of us. That invitation is always there. It is a challenge for us to be true disciples and true evangelists for the faith and to invite others to come to know what we know, and to receive what we receive and how important that is.

We also need to look into our own hearts. Are we generous the way God is generous with us? Do we show mercy and forgiveness? Or do we hold back? We have had two stories two weeks in a row that deal with this. Remember the servant who is forgiven the large debt and then he fails to forgive the servant who owes him the small debt. It is a challenge, but God is calling us to have a merciful heart. We need to pray for that. We need to pray for that openness and faith to understand that God’s way is better than our way. Let’s open our hearts. If you are struggling with this, if you are struggling with the idea of God forgiving others and allowing them in, then we need to reflect on the question that God asks in the Gospel today. “Are you envious because I am generous?” “The first will be last, and the last will be first.” We need to be reminded to be there for others, to be thankful, and to receive the generosity of God — and to show that generosity to others.

Father Christopher Comerford is pastor at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Quincy, IL.

(TASCAM DR 40 file 0053)