

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given September 21, 2008
Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Liturgical Year A

I recently took a vacation to California. We flew in and out of San Francisco, but also traveled up north to Mendocino, south to Monterey, and back to San Francisco. As we drove through Watsonville - the strawberry capital of California - we saw field upon field, with rows and rows of plants, and workers bent over at the waist, picking strawberries by hand. I was immediately aware of the physical challenge of this - 6 days a week, virtually all year round.

I came back home this week and imagined today's Gospel while in prayer. In my imagination, I was one of the first hired, and you were too. We are picking strawberries, bent at the waist, all day long, for \$38. Other pickers show up throughout the day. At the end, you and I watch as the latecomers get \$38, and we expect then that we'll get more. But we get \$38. We worked all day! She worked four hours, he worked two hours. I'm feeling angry, and so are you. We go to the master and make a complaint.

Just as the riot is about to break out, I recall that Jesus is talking not only about God - who is just and merciful - but about the Kingdom of God, which is not heaven, but the world being transformed and you and I being transformed by the love of God in Christ. We're called to be people of justice, but - sometimes when we've needed mercy more than justice - we've been more grateful. We're called to be people of mercy, but mercy is so demanding. Justice is often clearer and may require less of me. And a life of mercy and justice in our society, especially in an unstable economy, is difficult. How could I advocate for the excesses of mercy toward the chronically poor and disenfranchised in our society when really our financial security is at risk?

This parable of the good landowner is not just about the God whose mercy is excessive, but about a society where justice is not perfectly balanced, but instead marked by justice sliding toward mercy. These are things not just to be pondered in prayer but acted on in life, especially in an election year.

Isaiah tells us that God's thoughts are not always our thoughts; God's ways are not always our ways. But in Christ, the Son of God, we find a man like us for whom God's thoughts and ways and actions are *his* thoughts and ways and actions - and he offers us the same.

Having known not only justice from Christ but mercy beyond measure, let's ask him to help us live as people of justice, sliding towards mercy in our civic life, which will promote the world in progressing toward the Kingdom of Heaven.