

September 20, 2020

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Jesus often told stories, or parables to make people understand the ways of God. In today's Gospel he tells us of a God who thinks very different from how we think.

God's word to Isaiah: "My thoughts are not your thoughts." However we may try, we cannot justify the payment of the workers. It's just not fair.

At the end of the day the man surprises everyone by paying *all* the workers the same wage- equivalent to one day's work! If we worked the whole day and others came in during the last hour and got the same pay, we would be upset, saying that it isn't fair. The unions would surely get involved. Well, the laborers in the story were just as upset.

Why did Jesus tell this story? And what is the point?

In our Lord's time, Jewish law had become quite black and white. If you followed all the rules and commands, then you belonged to the righteous class, and you could *earn* your way into heaven. If you were not righteous and did not follow the rules and commands of Jewish law, you were an outcast who was doomed and there was *no hope* for you. There was no loving mercy or forgiveness.

Jesus told this parable to teach people that God does not think as we do and that there *is hope for everyone*, regardless of when they come to accept God in their lives.

Jesus wants us to understand that God's not here for some and not for others. He loves us all, and wants to give to everyone who comes to him. In the story, the last workers were as needy as the first. They needed just as much for their families as the first workers needed, and he gives them just as much.

When God spoke through Isaiah, some persons seem to have thought: when someone abandons God, then God abandons him; his chance is over. To this God responds "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways". However long someone has been distant from God, let him return to the Lord, and he will find mercy with him.

The point is that it really doesn't matter *when* or *how* we come to the Gospel, whether early, middle or later in life. It doesn't matter if we take a direct path to God or a round about one. It doesn't matter if we run to God with our arms wide open or if we falter along to Him. All that matters is that we actually *come* to the Gospel. God will lovingly enfold us if we come to Him. Yes, we will get the same welcome if we have always lived our lives following Jesus's example as we will if we came to God later in our lives. We can be like Mother Theresa or like the sinner on his deathbed. All that matters is that we actually come to the Gospel. Achievement counts for nothing; grace is everything! God will give us the same pay!

Devout Christians may find it hard to stomach that a deathbed penitent is admitted to the kingdom as easily as those who have struggled to live a faith-filled life always trying to follow Jesus' example. Our God is a loving parent opening his arms to his beloved children regardless of what we've been up to!

So, dear friends, get involved in your faith. Deepen your relationship of love with God over the years. Being faithful through a long life does bring some advantage over a late life conversion because you will already have a relationship with God and a room in the Father's house will have already been prepared for you. It's not a matter of God giving a greater reward, but that we'd be more capable of receiving it.

Stay safe and healthy.

Fr. Ignatius Tran

