

2020 September 20

Twenty-fifth Sunday of the Ordinary Time

Readings:

First: Isaiah 55.6-9, "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near" (6)

Psalm 145, "The Lord is near to all who call on him." (18a)

Second: Philippians 1.20-24, 27, "Live your life in a manner worthy of the Gospel." (27)

Gospel: Mathew 20.1-16, "Are you envious because I am generous?" (15b)

Divinely designed Equality

In today's parable Jesus does not directly speak about kingdom values, which must surpass the righteousness of this world. The Pharisees and other Jewish leaders of Jesus' time, and the justice system of our times follow the righteousness of this world. According to these values the workers in the vineyard are entitled to differential wages depending on the hours of work each one puts in. That is the way our world rewards workers. However, Jesus introduces a different standard.

We are technically with Jesus when we speak about family wages, which mean, wages required to support the whole family. However, we rarely practice the family wage system; that is, normally the workers get wages only according to the standards established by the employer, generally depending on the educational qualifications and the hours of work. We do not come across the kind of generosity the landlord in today's parable practices. In the justice system of Jesus and of his kingdom everyone gets according to one's needs, not more, nor less, and never according to anyone's greed.

Prophet Isaiah adds to this message by presenting God's ways, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" (Isaiah 55.8-9) Jesus supports the generosity of the landlord and his doing with his wealth what he prefers to do. Jesus points at the workers' envy, which is not about one being deprived of any rights, but it is intolerance that someone else has more than what I have.

People, including good Christians, like the idea of being unequal, that is, the other, my neighbor, can have only less than what I have; or I should always have more than I may have the feeling and position of superiority. For the worldly wealth, possessions, fame, name, power, position, public adulation, etc., count for superiority. Jesus teaches the opposite. For him poverty, humility, meekness, suffering, persecution, humanly unseen work, etc., are values that make one great and heir of the kingdom. For Jesus those who want to be the master should become the slave first, and those who seek life should opt for death. These seem to be not values for us and hence we do not accept or follow them. To that extent we are away from the Kingdom.

Fr. George

