

HOMILY for 25th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday tells us about the Parable of the workers & the owner of the vineyard. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

The Orderly's duties included bringing his new boss a cup of coffee at six o'clock every morning, & every morning the boss was enraged because the coffee cup arrived two-thirds full. None of his insults & fits of rage produced a full cup of coffee, until he threatened the fellow with a one-third cut in pay.

The next morning he was greeted with a cup of coffee full to the brim, & the morning after that, the morning after that. Finally, the boss couldn't resist smugly complimenting the Orderly on his mastery of the new technique.

"Oh, there's nothing much to it, sir," admitted the fellow cheerfully. "I take some coffee in my mouth right outside of the breakroom, & spit it back in outside of your office."

Anyway, I had a former parishioner who used to be a member of the local Union of Auto Workers (UAW) in Lansing & found this Sunday's Gospel unfair & hard to accept. She expressed similar complaint like the first group of workers & said, "This last group did only an hour's work, but you have put them on the same basis as us who have worked a full day in the scorching heat." But, I don't think that she is alone on that. In fact, most of us here would agree with the first group of workers & expect to get paid more for working longer hours & enduring tougher working condition. That is how we humans understand about work & set up a system of compensation according to those factors. We define fairness by paying according to the hours of work & the workload. If we come early to work, we expect to get paid first & for all the hours that we worked. If we come last to work, we will get paid last & only for the hours that we actually did something. Again, that is how our human system of compensation & justice is expected to deliver.

However, this Sunday Jesus wants to introduce the new divine system of compensation & justice for us to review & work toward. That is why He shares with us the Parable of the Workers in the vineyard. Here is how the Parable ends, "...When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to the foreman, 'Call the workmen & give them their pay, but begin with the last group & end with the first.'" It continues, "...'My friend,' he [the owner of the vineyard] said to [the first worker], 'I do you no injustice. You agreed on the usual wage, did you not? Take your pay & go home. I intend to give this man who was hired last the same pay as you. I am free to do as I please with my money, am I not? Or, are you envious because I am generous?'" Evidently the new divine system of compensation & justice is contrary to the similar human system. For we humans would begin to pay the first group of workers first & go down the list to the last group of workers. We would never put the last group of workers before the first one, or compensate the last workers the same as the first ones. We would consider something like that to be unfair & absolutely wrong. But, is it? Is our current human system of compensation & justice really fair & admirable as we might think?

This Sunday Jesus wants us to rethink the whole human system of compensation & justice by introducing us to the divine one with the help of the Parable of the Workers. Here is the basic summary of the divine system of compensation & justice: "...Call the workmen & give them their pay, but begin with the last group & end up with the first... I intend to give this man who was hired last the same pay as you. I am free to do as I please with my money, am I not?"

Or, are you envious because I am generous? Thus, the last shall be first, & the first shall be last.” It seems like the new divine system of compensation & justice that Jesus introduced in today’s Gospel will challenge our current system & call us to align our minds & hearts to be like God the Father, namely, to be much better & different from a typical human thought. What am I talking about? Jesus sure did not want us to stick with the status quo & expect better results to come out of it. With our current system of compensation & justice, we will continue to have envy, jealousy, greed, & all sorts of fights. However, if we act like the owner of the vineyard & compensate generously, even to the workers who joined the workforce late, we will help change our world dramatically & challenge it to act like God the Father who lets the Sun shine on the good and the bad in this life. Like God the Father, Jesus wants us to convert the world & help move it closer to the Kingdom of Heaven. That is why he came into the world to convert it & save it. He wants the world to be compassionate & generous like God the Father & treat one another the same way.

In case we have any doubt about that dream/vision of Jesus & God the Father, today’s First Reading has this reminding message for us, “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call Him while He is near. Let the scoundrel forsake his way, & the wicked man his thoughts; let him turn to the Lord for mercy; to our God, who is generous & forgiving... As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways & my thoughts above your thoughts.” We are advised to seek the Lord & His way. For His ways & thoughts are higher & better than ours. We are encouraged to help the scoundrel forsake his wrongful way & wicked person abandon his bad thoughts. For the Lord is forgiving & generous in mercy. We are called to be like the Lord & turn away from our old ways of lie. For the Lord is compassionate & generous. That is how we could get out of our current vicious circle of envy & greed. That is who we could transform our current world & turn it into a peaceful & loving place like Heaven. It is unfortunate for us to hear some misled Christians & blinded ministers who have focused only on the task of “being born again” & forgotten about the mission of converting their lives over to the Lord. They have missed out on the main mission of Christ. He came to convert the world & convince it to come back to God the Father with His suffering & death on the Cross. If we do not change our current thoughts & ways of life & try to be compassionate & generous like God the Father, we will continue to fight with one another on every little thing like we see what is happening in the world right now. Our country has been blessed in many ways compared to the third world countries. So, let us live generously & act compassionately toward one another like God the Father.

My dear brothers & sisters, many parables & stories in the Bible are about the need for the world to convert. For God the Father desires nothing more than having someone turn away from one’s former way of life & come back to Him. In fact, Jesus once told us that all the angels in Heaven would rejoice over the repentance of one sinner instead of ninety-nine righteous people who do not need God’s mercy. That is why God the Father wants to pay the last worker the same as the first one, or the sinner the same as the cradle-born Catholic. Is that fair in our eyes? Maybe not; but that is how the new divine system of compensation & justice works as the last/the sinner will end up first & the first/ the cradle-born Catholic will end up last in the Kingdom of Heaven.