

God's Generous Grace

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Sorry about my voice. You know, usually after spending five days with the Trappist monks on a silent retreat at Berryville, Virginia, I would come back and my voice would be fresh and livelier, but it always seems to have a hard time waking up, so I'll do the best I can.

One of the great things about these parables is that a parable always tells us something about the nature of God and the nature of God's kingdom. And so, with this parable tonight, we know it's not about business or hiring or wages; it's about God's sovereignty and God's generosity.

And this is something that Jesus apparently really wants us to understand, because we judge so many things as human beings in terms of our model and our standard of what is fair. That's not how God rations grace at all.

God gives us grace according to our need, and sometimes there is quite a disparity, or it appears that there's quite a disparity, between what one person gets and what another person gets. But it was St. Thomas Aquinas who reminds us that people perceive different measures of grace based on how well they cooperate with the grace that's given.

St. Teresa of Ávila was right on board with that, saying that we receive grace and garner holiness precisely according to our readiness to receive that grace and cooperate with it. And one of the disparities that we see in the lives of the saints is that some of these saints got holy really quick.

They became saints at a very young age. We think of Maria Goretti, who had the grace to endure martyrdom; Carlo Acutis, who handled his terminal illness in a sacred way; the Ugandan Martyrs, who were martyred—who were tortured—but even some of those were like ten and eleven and twelve years old.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux contracted tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four. It would seem that God really loaded them up on the front end of their lives to accomplish His purpose, which was their sanctity, their holiness, and ultimately salvation.

Which brings us to the point of understanding that God gives each and every one of us enough grace every day to attain salvation. And that's really, really important to

understand, because, as we heard in the Gospel tonight, one of the problems in our humanity is that we can start to compare ourselves to other people.

Imagining how much more grace they're getting than we are, or how much they are progressing in spiritual life and I'm not. And one of the things that the saints consistently tell us is: don't compare yourself to another person.

If you're going to compare yourself to someone, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, compare yourself to Jesus, not someone else. Because remember, each of us is on a very unique path to God, and God takes that into consideration, just as you who are parents do with your children.

If one child needs a little bit more help in this area, you give that child more help. It doesn't mean you love the other children less.

You know what to give this child, but this child does need more. And that's how God is with us when it comes to God's distribution of grace in our lives.

God knows what we need, and He gives it to us. We can let go of the myth that health and wealth mean that, well, God favors that person, or that the difficulties and the hardships of my life mean that I've fallen out of God's favor.

Not true at all. Most of the saints experienced serious hardships in their lives, and they used those hardships as opportunities to grow in holiness through the grace that God gave them through that hard time in their life.

Or when we think that our spiritual life is stagnating, it's stymied, and we ask, 'Why is God being so stingy with grace?' One of the things we want to remember is there's a difference between what we're feeling and grace.

Sometimes grace feels good, but sometimes God withdraws the feeling without withdrawing the grace. If you're getting the grace and you're getting the feeling, then you should feel good about it.

That's called a consolation. And so this is all about this serious myth of God, who is this incredibly generous giver.

God will not be outdone in generosity. He gives every drop of grace that we need every single day, not only to attain salvation but to grow in personal holiness.

The thing that defeats envy—and envy is the sorrow that we feel for another person's gain, for their good fortune—and Jesus brought that up in the parable: 'Are you envious because I'm generous?'

If you want to check your envy, put yourself in that Gospel. So imagine that you are one of the workers who worked twelve hours, and your best friend comes up to you and says, 'Look what happened to me. I got paid a full day's wage by just showing up at the last minute.' Are you happy for your best friend, or are you mad as a wet hornet? Okay, now you passed that test if you're really happy for your friend.

Now imagine it's somebody you don't know, a total stranger, showing up and saying, 'Hey, guess what? I got paid the same as you. You worked twelve hours, I just showed up at the last minute, and I got paid the same.' There's envy. That's envy, and that's a capital sin.

And so the Lord wants us to check that. We've got to check ourselves so we don't wreck ourselves on the rocks of envy.

You know, humility is a powerful virtue that helps us to defeat envy. Humility is really the archenemy of envy.

And one of the things that the Litany of Humility tells us, one of the petitions in there, is, 'Lord, may others become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as You need me to become.' So allowing others to receive all the graces that they need, even if it's more than what we think we should get, to be satisfied with what the Lord gives us. To be grateful for that.

And there's a great song—if you remember nothing else from this homily—by Matt Maher. He's a wonderful Christian leader of a band. One of his songs is called 'Your Grace Is Enough.' He's quoting Saint Paul, actually.

And that's the whole point: 'Lord, Your grace is enough, not only for me to make it through this day, not only for me to survive whatever life throws at me, but it's enough for me to go just a little bit more into holiness and to ultimately attain salvation.'

So let us thank the Lord for these beautiful parables that reveal something of the nature of God and something of His kingdom. And as we thank the Lord with grateful hearts for the grace that He gives us, may we remember the wisdom in our first reading, remembering that God's thoughts are above our thoughts, and God's ways are above our ways.