

September 24, 2023
Cycle A – 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55:6-9

Psalms 144:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

Matthew 20:1-16a

Notes from Bishop Peter

THEME: “As high as the heavens are above earth,
so high are my ways above your ways and
my thoughts above your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:9)

1. God is full of surprises. We see one example in today’s Gospel from Matthew.
 - a. It is in Jesus’ parable about the generous landowner. This man goes to the marketplace where day laborers gather and hires workers for his vineyard, promising to pay what is just. Some begin at dawn, others are hired throughout the day including those who work for only one hour.
 - b. The landowner tells his steward (in charge of finances) to give to each worker a day’s wage, beginning with those hired last. When those who began work at dawn see this, they expect more and grumble when they don’t. The landowner responds that they agreed to work for the normal day’s wage and that he is free to do with his money as he wishes when he gives those hired last the same wage.
 - c. Actually it is out of compassion that the generous landowner gives to the last a whole day’s pay. Why? Because he knows that they and their families will most likely not have enough money for very simple meals without this support.
2. What should have been the reaction of those hired earlier? “How generous this man is to give our brothers what he paid us. We are happy for them. Now they can feed their families at least for one day.” In short, JUSTICE VERSUS MERCY!
 - a. Those hired first argue from the perspective of justice. The landowner, though just, responds from one of mercy.

3. Why did Jesus use this parable? In his ministry, he reached out to the sick and lepers, to tax collectors (hated by the populace because they would charge too much and pocket what was left over after they paid off the Romans and the temple authorities) and to outcasts such as prostitutes.
 - a. His adversaries, mainly the scribes (doctors of the Law of Moses) and the Pharisees, thought Jesus was too lenient. But Jesus' ways are not theirs or, perhaps, ours. The Kingdom is open to those who really know they need God. Consequently Jesus tells his disciples and us to be merciful as his Heavenly Father is merciful.
4. Other examples: Mercy or Justice: The famous actor, John Wayne, becomes a Catholic on his deathbed, is baptized and all his sins are forgiven. Are we elated because of God's mercy or do we think: "I have been a Catholic all my life (I have born the heat of the day as did the workers in the parable) and he gets the same benefits as I do. It's not fair!" Do people say the same thing about the good thief or revolutionary whom Jesus while dying on the cross, promised to take to heaven that very day? What, no purgatory?
5. When I look at my life, I rejoice that God is rich in mercy because I believe that I will be judged when I die through the lens of mercy rather than justice if I am sorry for my sins. I am sure this is your belief too.
6. We come to the Eucharist: First, let us renew our faith that, according to Jesus' own words, the bread and wine become and remain truly his body and blood, soul and divinity. It is not a symbol. When we go to communion we really and truly receive Jesus Christ who transforms us into images of his very self in as much as we are open to letting him do so.
 - a. Also, Jesus gives each person the grace of repentance and the assurance that if we do repent, he will be our merciful judge because he knows from his experience on this earth how difficult our lives can be.

Amen.