

## **Homily For the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year A**

**St. Peter's Sat 5:00pm/Sun 8:00am Masses September 20, 2020**

**Isaiah 55:6-9** "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways and thoughts than yours."

**Psalms 145:2-18** "The Lord is near to all who call on him ... in truth."

**Phil. 1:20-24,27** "To me, living is Christ and dying is gain ... Live your life worthy of the Gospel of Christ. "

**Matt. 20:1-16** "Are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last"

### **God Doesn't Think Like Me**

#### **Introduction**

Why is the Bible so hard to understand? If God wanted us to know him, shouldn't he have arranged to make it a little more obvious in the words of Sacred Scripture? St. Augustine had the best answers to the people who used to ask him that question that is still asked today. First, he said, if the bible was always easy, we would become proud and think ourselves wonderful. Second, we would become lazy because we would not have to work hard at it and so develop a hunger for the beauty of the Good News.

Not everyone is ready to hear the message of the Good News. When the disciples asked Jesus why he spoke in parables, that's kind of what he said. Those who want to understand it will make an effort and they will get it. Those who don't want to understand it won't get it, even if it's handed to them on a silver platter.

#### **Matthew**

A parable Jesus told takes up the entire Gospel passage for today. He tells of a landowner with a vineyard and he needs labourers to work in it. A landowner is an image used throughout the Old Testament to show the Lord cultivating and caring for his people.

The workday was from sunrise to sunset. It's a 12 hour day. Those who worked 12 hours get a day's pay. Those who started at another time should only get part of a day's wage. Interestingly, the manager starts handing out coins to those who

started working last. So those being paid first only worked an hour and were only expecting one hour's pay. When they got a whole day's pay, those who worked all day suddenly expect 12 times what those guys got. How easily do our expectations go up when it looks like we suddenly feel entitled to something more. That is the power of sin at work in us.

From time to time, my mother would prepare Kraft Dinner for my brothers and me. That was such a treat for us. But it also caused a fight every time because we were sure we weren't getting our fair share. This was especially true for us older ones. We were bigger, and had bigger appetites. Those little brothers came later and should get less. I even remember a time when we decided to count out the noodles. They were cold by the time we finished counting.

There was nothing unfair about what the landowner did. Those who worked all day got what had been agreed upon. But it is very human for this kind of thing to cause envy and hostility. Try paying a few people more than they have a right to. It would cause chaos in any workplace. Work would come to a halt.

But it's not just in the workplace or kids fighting over Kraft Dinner. Once I met a woman who had won \$7 million in a lottery. She had three sisters to whom she gave an equal sum as a gift. The sisters almost immediately began fighting over how much she gave them and who had the greatest need and therefore should get a bigger gift. They soon were not talking to each other and the generous woman had a nervous breakdown, despite her new worldly riches.

In the world, it is very difficult to figure out exactly what someone deserves. We look at the rich and say they don't deserve that. We notice all the times when we feel we haven't gotten our fair share. We look at some people's misfortunes and say they got what they deserved. All of these attitudes and more are the way people think, not the way God things.

The issue is that really none of us deserves what we get from the ultimate landowner and caretaker, the Lord of life. None of us can work hard enough or long enough to earn God's love, or salvation, or eternal life. That's a free gift. None of us is deserving of his grace or has a claim on his blessings.

The landowner says to the grumbling worker: Are you envious because I am generous? In the Greek New Testament, it is literally: Is your eye evil because I am good? The 'evil eye' is a Semitic image that describes someone who is envious, grudging, or lacking in generosity. Jealousy is the desire to possess what someone else has. Envy is the sin of being upset at another's good fortune. St. Thomas says that love is desiring the good of another, so we can see that envy works the opposite of love.

The wisdom of the world says this passage is about fairness. The wisdom of God says that it is about his extravagant love and mercy. Human wisdom says you get what you deserve. Divine wisdom says you get the fullness of what God is offering if, and only if, you have a heart that is ready to receive it, and if you say no to envy. We cannot experience salvation if we are trying to be the judge of who deserves it and who doesn't.

In my years as a carpenter, there was a day when four of us were renovating a house. It was a nice day and we were eating our sandwiches out on the lawn when a garbage truck came by to pick up the trash. One of the guys started grumbling that the garbage collectors were negotiating with the City for higher wages when we couldn't get a raise as skilled non union employees.

I thought, hey, I know a bible story that addresses this situation exactly. I ran to my car where I kept a bible in the back seat, took it out and read this parable to my work buddies. Well, that stopped the grumbling. It also stopped the conversation entirely. They didn't talk to me for the rest of the day. I suppose that was a mistake because it looked like I was judging them. Maybe I was, but my hope is still that some day all of us realize what Jesus is speaking to us through this parable, that envy will destroy the free gift of God's own blessed life in us.

## **Isaiah**

Isaiah reminds all of Judah that God's thoughts and God's ways are higher than ours. Every time Jesus compares the wisdom of God with the wisdom of the world - and he does this a lot - he is revisiting and fulfilling the meaning of this passage from Isaiah: God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours.

In *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis has a character refer to Aslan, the Christ figure, saying: After all, he is not a tame lion. For us, this means that we won't be able to make God our pet and do tricks for you. He asks us to seek his thoughts, where they are above ours.

Isaiah goes on to say: "Seek him where he may be found." Well, God is everywhere we look. If we can't see him, it is because WE are hiding, like Adam after they sinned. God called out: "Adam, where are you?" Not because he didn't know where Adam was hiding, but because Adam had changed their close relationship into something distant. Who moved? Adam, not God. That's the way it is with us.

### **Philippians**

When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, he was in prison on very serious charges. He faced the real possibility of his death. How many thought about our own deaths as we heard of those being put on respirators and dying isolated? These are actually sacred moments, when we get that opportunity to consider our own life and death and the ultimate gift God has prepared for those who love him.

St. Therese was four when she heard about the beauty and joy of life in heaven. She loved her mother intensely. And yet, when she gained an insight into heaven, she told her mother she wished for her that she could die so she could be there in that glorious existence.

Life in this present age is not the ultimate goal. Dying is gain because dying means departing and being with Christ, Paul says. Dying would be better for him but worse for the Philippians whom he serves. For Paul to desire and choose life, rather than death, is to act in Christ-like love, emptying himself of selfish interest and acting for the welfare of others.

We are at a strange time when it comes to thinking like God. As our understanding of the vastness and complexity of the universe has grown, our idea of God has become smaller and smaller and, for many, has disappeared entirely.

With all of the things in the world that we think are going to make us happy, jealousy and envy are everywhere.

### **Call To Action**

We can always count on Jesus turning worldly wisdom upside down. It should never surprise us that he will do the same with us in our own lives. With the wisdom of the world, what God does is never going to make sense. It is never going to seem right UNLESS we look at things from God's perspective. That is our Christian task.

The psalmist says that the Lord is near to all who call, who call on him in truth. That means with sincere hearts turned to God. Next time we catch ourselves grumbling about what someone else has, turn it upside down and ask our generous Lord to see through the eyes of truth, the one who is truth, Jesus Christ. There is no other place to look for the thoughts and ways of God.

## **Key Verses Today**

**Isaiah:** *Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Return to the Lord for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

**Psalms:** *The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.*

**Romans:** *Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. I do not know which I prefer. My desire is to depart and be with Christ. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Live your life in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.*

**Matthew:** *The Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. About nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle and said: You also go and I will pay you whatever is right. At noon and three and at five o'clock he found others idle. They said: no one has hired us. He said: You also go into the vineyard. When those hired about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage. The first thought they would receive more, but each also received the usual daily wage. They grumbled: The last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day. But he replied to one of them: Friend, did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last.*