

## *The Economy of Grace*

Homily for September 23-24, 2023  
25<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

There is an old rabbinic parable about a farmer that had two sons. As soon as they were old enough to walk, he took them to the fields and he taught them everything that he knew about growing crops and raising animals. When he got too old to work, the two boys took over the chores of the farm and when the father died, they had found their working together so meaningful that they decided to keep their partnership. So each brother contributed what he could and during every harvest season, they would divide equally what they had corporately produced. Across the years the elder brother never married, stayed an old bachelor. The younger brother did marry and had eight wonderful children. Some years later when they were having a wonderful harvest, the old bachelor brother thought to himself one night, "My brother has ten mouths to feed. I only have one. He really needs more of his harvest than I do, but I know he is much too fair to renegotiate. I know what I'll do. In the dead of the night when he is already asleep, I'll take some of what I have put in my barn and I'll slip it over into his barn to help him feed his children.

At the very time he was thinking down that line, the younger brother was thinking to himself, "God has given me these wonderful children. My brother hasn't been so fortunate. He really needs more of this harvest for his old age than I do, but I know him. He's much too fair. He'll never renegotiate. I know what I'll do. In the dead of the night when he's asleep, I'll take some of what I've put in my barn and slip it over into his barn." And so one night when the moon was full, as you may have already anticipated, those two brothers came face to face, each on a mission of generosity. The old rabbi said that there wasn't a cloud in the sky, a gentle rain began to fall. You know what it was? God weeping for joy because two of his children had gotten the point. Two of his children had come to realize that generosity is the deepest characteristic of the holy and because we are made in God's image, our being generous is the secret to our joy as well.

This is the economy of grace the theme at the heart of today's Gospel.

How challenging this reading is for our ears to hear and hearts to receive. This is because the economy of grace unsettles our perception of how we measure worth. We are so prone to see our identity rooted in our achievements and in how hard we work. And there is nothing wrong with achievements or hard work. However when they govern and dictate our identity it can be hard to live out the economy of grace because we are influenced by the economy of justice. Again justice is an important economic scale because people should make a fair and equitable wage. The social teaching of the Church repeatedly and vocally endorses this.

However, what we want to hear today and receive in our hearts is this theme. We don't approach God on the grounds of justice - that is fairness. Rather we approach him on the grounds of his grace - that is mercy. This is why in the first reading God invites all people to draw close to him, whether early or late in their lives. This is because, as Isaiah teaches:

***“that he may have mercy upon them, because he is the God of who abundantly pardons”.***

The prophet then goes on to celebrate the economy of grace this way:

***For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.  
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.<sup>1</sup>***

Two people who discovered the economy of grace later in life were Felix Leseur and St Angela of Foligno.

Felix Leseur was raised Catholic but lost his faith in medical school and became an atheist. His wife, Elisabeth, on the other hand, grew closer to God and began praying fervently for her husband’s conversion. After her death at the age of 47, Felix began reading her diary, and he returned to the Lord at the age of 56. Eventually he was ordained a priest.

St Angela was born in 1248 into a wealthy family in Umbria. Married at a young age, she reveled in the worldly life and all its trappings. But a series of natural disasters and an ongoing war led her to re-examine her priorities. At the age of thirty seven- considered mid-life for the time, she sought the Lord’s mercy in Confession. Then after the premature death of her husband, mother, and two children, she gave up all her possessions and became a lay Franciscan.

When we hear about people like Felix and Angela we celebrate that later in life they came to the vineyard and we don’t begrudge them their heavenly reward. God and his angels in heaven still rejoiced as these two came to this divine economy.

This is what the Lord is placing on display for us in the parable for the workers in the vineyard. Whether the workers started at 6 AM, like the first, or 5 PM, like the last, when it comes to the allocation of pay they received the same and those who were hired first grumble. What Jesus wants us to see in the parable is what the brothers in the rabbinic story and Felix and Angela realized. All of life is a gift - my identity is measured not primarily in what I produce, but rather in what I receive. The key to the parable is found at the end when the land owner in response says to the early hires:

***Are you envious because I am generous?***

St Paul in thinking about the economy of grace looks forward to the evening when he will receive the denarius of grace. He is focused on his departure from this life because to be with the Lord, is, well, will be far better. However he also understands that he is to continue to live in this world so he can inspire others to live a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (Is 55:8–9). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

What does a life look like influenced by the economy of grace look like? Well like the lives of the brothers in the rabbinic story. In applying this teaching about God's generosity I want to share with you a request for you to prayerfully consider.

Each year St Peter's we are asked to contribute to Together in Action (TIA) This is the yearly Bishop's Appeal where 2 million dollars is raised 1.4 million goes to various ministries within the diocese, like care for retired priests, Elizabeth House, and the Calgary Immigration Society Refugee Support. \$600,000 over the next four years will go to support local or regional healing and reconciliation initiatives for residential school survivors, their families, and their communities.

The TIA website has these words: “

***In sharing His infinite love, we become a bright light in this dark world and bring glory to His name through our actions. Our dedication to service and love will surely inspire others to do the same. Your generous donation will go a long way in helping us continue our ministries and making a positive difference in the world.***

TIA is a tangible way to express the economy of grace,.

St. Peter's 2023 target for TIA is \$74,862. To date we have raised just over \$21,000 which means we have \$53,500.00 remaining. This year we have 995 identifiable givers. If each of these givers contributed \$54.00 we will reach our target of \$74,000.

Can I ask you, have you contributed to Together in Action this year? I made my donation yesterday. Can I please ask you to prayerfully consider making donation this week? You can do this easily on the Diocesan Website or directly through St Peter's.

To live as the brothers did and to understand and experience the generosity of God inspires us to say:

I want to live my life with the economy of grace shaping me to become more like Jesus, who is generous inside and out!