

25th Sunday, yr. A, Xavier Church, Isa., 55, 6-9; Phil. 1, 20-24. 27a; Mt. 20, 1-16a.

Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, when we hear the parable of the landowner and the workers, the feeling may come over us that it is indeed unfair, the way the landowner proceeds. He gives as much to the last ones, who have only worked in the vineyard for a very short time, as to the first ones, who have endured the heat of the day. Similarly, we may sometimes wonder: Why are certain people doing well, who have put in much less effort than we have? And as believers, we may think: we have made an effort to go to Church, we have been praying. And they, what are they doing? And yet most of them are doing quite well!

It is good then if we realise why Jesus tells this parable. He is talking about the Kingdom of heaven! In the Kingdom of heaven, the rewards are so great, we can hardly imagine. There, as St. Paul says, we will be with Christ and that is far better.

If, after having listened to this parable, you may find the landowner's treatment unfair, then I challenge you to look at the other side of that situation. If you have work, then you can help build a better world with others. That can be very fulfilling. If you don't have a job, there is a threat of isolation, you may feel like you don't count. The landowner counters this with his payments. He makes sure everyone get paid the same amount.

So in the end, the reward is the same regardless of our efforts. In the kingdom of heaven, blessing and reward are obtained through the mercy and love of God. His thoughts are not our thoughts. Because His love is everlasting, there is no reason for envy or greed. This is something, we can train ourselves in. We don't have to look jealously at our neighbour who might have more wealth than we have. And we don't need more all the time when we have enough.

This parable can also encourage us to value work without income more. Voluntary work, as this also happens in our church. It is also satisfying when you facilitate for others to come to prayer, to find new inspiration. It can be satisfying to look after each other. To care for one's neighbour has become an important theme in the coming Dutch elections. This is a common theme especially in rural areas, but neighbourly help and looking after each other is also on the rise in urban areas, as it can strengthen safety and togetherness in the neighbourhood.

But, dear brothers and sisters, we still may have a sense of unfairness when we let the parable of the landowner sink in. With God, there is no injustice. So, first we will have to keep testing ourselves. Have we perhaps forgotten, how much the Lord gives to us? Faith in Him gives rest and peace. That rest and peace is nourished by the hope of eternal life. That really is a very great comfort, to live in this hope of eternal bliss.

At the same time, Catholic doctrine assumes that purgatory exists. The Catechism says the following about purgatory in No 1030: 'Those who die in the grace and friendship of God, but are not yet fully purified, although already assured of their eternal salvation, undergo a purification after death in order to acquire the necessary holiness to enter into the joy of heaven.' So it is not the case that we can just do whatever we want, knowing that God will be merciful in the end anyway. That would indeed be unjust. Yes, in the end the reward is equally great for everybody. But in the case of smaller sins, we believe that before the final judgement of God, there can be purification after death. Therefore, as a Church community, we also pray for the departed, so that after being purified, they can come to the blissful, eternal contemplation of God. Amen.