

Septuagesima Sunday
January 28, 2024
Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

Focal Text: vs. 1- The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen.

Fr. Mike has preached a sermon in the past about the prodigal son, that can appropriately be called the “Gospel of It’s Not Fair!” And we see the same indignation of the workers who were called at the start of the day against those who worked for only an hour or so at the end. We can sympathize with those workers as we all have had our experiences of co-workers being paid more than us for the same work, or less work. It isn’t fair to us.

With that in mind, let’s look at the actions of the vineyard owner in the parable and how it relates to the Kingdom of Heaven.

There are two warnings in this gospel and three reminders.

The first warning was for the Apostles, as they had the privilege of being the first Christians! More joined them in the beginning and stood with and supported them. But no special honor or special status was awarded just because they were *first*. ALL believers, regardless of when they are called to Christ’s Church, are equally precious in God’s eyes.

When my mom was doing research for a novel called “Ahab’s Bride,” she visited churches throughout New England. She

noted that there were family pews that were paid for and reserved. Woe be to the visitor who sat there unwittingly. New Christians are not gate crashers. They are fellow laborers in the vineyard of souls. I am reminded of the fictionalized account of the “Unsinkable Molly Brown” in the movies. She was a survivor of the Titanic. The ‘old money’ people in first class who inherited their money looked down on her because her husband acquired his money in the gold mining business. Yet she was the one, both in the movies and in real life, who helped others get a spot in a lifeboat regardless of social status by returning to the wreck. That’s the way we should be in our welcome to newcomers. Praise God that the members of this parish *family* are always loving and welcoming to visitors.

The second warning was to the Jews, not to look down on Gentile converts. The gentiles were *not* inferior and should not be seen as such. The Jewish Christians expected Gentile converts to be circumcised. The Apostle Paul, as Fr. Mike’s homily for the Feast of the Circumcision told us, that was the requirement of the *old* covenant, and not a requirement any more.

If you are familiar with the economic idea of most favored nation, it provides us with a great example. It’s an economic idea that a nation is to be treated favorably in trade. Those who are not a favored nation don’t receive those benefits and withholding that status can be used to sanction other countries. There is NO most favored nation in God’s economy. There is a fair balance of trade between long-term Christians and new converts. There is an infectious excitement in new Christians and a hunger for God’s word that the older Christians can use,

not only rekindle their own faith, but to mentor and teach the new.

As I said earlier, there are three reminders of God's love for his people.

The first reminder in this gospel today is that in the Kingdom of Heaven, the reward is in the comfort of God. Whether one enters the Kingdom of God early in life or later, he is equally dear to God. The reward is in the comfort of God.

The second reminder is that the reward is in the infinite compassion of God. The vineyard owner had an element of tenderness as he saw men in the courtyards not working. These men needed to work to feed their families. The master of the vineyard couldn't bear to see the men idle and be excluded from the rewards of service. The reward is in the infinite compassion of God.

The third reminder is that the reward is in the generosity of God. Whether they worked all day or just an hour, the master of the vineyard paid everyone the same. Without them ALL, there would be no harvest. His gratitude was as generous to them as God is to us. So long as it is all we have to give, all service ranks the same to God. The reward is in the generosity of God.

Finally, I like to point out that the master said, "friend, I didn't cheat you, that was the agreed upon reward." He was kind in his rebuke. He didn't yell or scold. He was firm and loving. What a great example for *us* in our dealings.

Having looked at these reminders and warnings, do we still think that it's not fair? The master has called us to serve. To be

laborers in his vineyard. Some of us were called long ago. Others of us more recently. Whenever it was, we are all called to serve. The great news is that the rewards are everlasting! So let us work in God's together, helping one another, through the heat of the day or in the evening. Then we can enjoy the benefits of our labor together in unity and in communion.

Amen