

Bishop's Reflection – 25th Sunday

In a world that is so often caught up in who is deserving, important or valued and who is not, Jesus' parable does little to settle the issue. Who would even think of paying a casual last-minute addition to the payroll as much as the ones who had been with you from the beginning?

"Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?" The labourer was more than happy to receive the offer at the beginning of the day. The money would have been sufficient for all of his immediate needs. It was also more than enough to keep him motivated in all that he was asked to endure. What, at first, seemed fair and just, no longer seems that way.

God's Kingdom, we are told, is marked by an unusual generosity, a generosity towards those who are last and least. It is not so much a matter of excluding anyone, as it is a matter of including those who may seem less deserving. "Take what belongs to you and go." Harsh words addressed to those who opposed Jesus' teaching that places everyone on an equal footing in the sight of God, and judged others as inferior in some way.

In the early Church, this passage was often cited in Christian communities that had a mix of Jewish and non-Jewish believers (Those who were part of God's People from the very beginning and those who came later). It was also cited when talking about those who joined the Christian community late in life. Are we not all on an equal footing, or are there some who are more deserving and entitled to better treatment or a greater reward than others? The question can also be applied to many questions dealing with justice and the basic human rights that everyone should enjoy.

We have only to look at our government's response in trying to provide for everyone during this time of pandemic. There are some who continued to work, some who returned to work at a later time and some who remain on the government benefit. In some cases, the amount of income each receives continues to be the same. At first, most people were in agreement; but I wonder if the same remains true today. It doesn't take long for us to lose focus on the ongoing need to provide for each citizen in a time of crisis, and to begin chipping away at the unfairness of some people having to work for the money they receive, while others do little or nothing at all.

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near." This is God's Word as it is recorded by the prophet Isaiah, who goes on to say, "Let the wicked person forsake their way, and the unrighteous person their thoughts; let that person return to the Lord that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The reading goes on to say that, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." To some, God's way of welcoming the sinner may seem grossly unfair. To those who recognize their need for mercy, God's way of mercy opens a door that may have seemed closed to them.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning" ...and again, about nine o'clock... and again, about noon and three o'clock... and again, an hour before quitting time, "and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard," and, "Why are you standing idle all day?" Have we grown lax in our response, idle in our failure to respond or lost the joy of extending the invitation to others?

The kingdom of heaven takes all kinds, and we are called at various stages of our lives, "let us make sure no one is left behind." This may be a wonderful motto at a time of pandemic, but an equally apt one when dealing with the pandemic of sin and the mercy we find in God.