

Sunday Homily
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time A
September 18, 2011
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Hey, that's not fair!

How come the guys that worked only one hour received the same pay as the guys that worked 12 hours?! That's not fair.

As children we are all taught to grow from "mine" to "share" to "play fair". The concept of treating each other fairly is taught to us from our youngest days. "Do unto others as you would like them to do to you" ring any bells?

So how are we to understand this parable of the Generous Landowner? What can we learn about how different God's ways are compared to our ways?

It is interesting to examine this parable not just from our own sense of fairness, but the sense of fairness that was part of the Middle Eastern culture of Jesus' time. Because if you think the landowner's actions offend our sense of fairness, the people of Jesus' time were absolutely insulted by the landowner's generosity towards some.

We view the world from a sense of plenty. We have plenty of everything we need available to us if we only work hard and go after it. And if someone has more than we do, we believe that if we work for it, we can have it too.

The people of Jesus' society viewed the world from a sense of scarcity. If you have a job, there may not be one for me. They believed that everything was limited and already distributed! In other words, the jobs at the vineyard were already filled in the morning; how dare any worker think there may be more jobs in the afternoon? And, to ask for a job is to deprive the owner of something he owns. To ask for a job is shameful. They had to wait to be invited to work – that's why they were in the market square.

And once the job was offered, and accepted, "for the usual daily wage" these men worked a full twelve hour day for the accepted daily wage. They were treated fairly as employees by their employer. But they became offended when others who had worked far less were paid the same – offended not because of the money, but because these later workers were treated as family, by a patron. They received out of generosity, not out of fairness.

The first-hired workers realized that they were merely hired hands, and nothing more to this landowner. While others who did less work were treated as family!

And when these workers brought this offense to the landowner's attention, the landowner asked them if they were "envious because I am generous?" "Envious" is our American

translation of the literal Greek “Is your eye evil?” And to cast the “evil eye” on someone was not just to wish them ill, but to wish death or loss of property on a person.

Wow! The generous and gracious and undeserved actions of the landowner towards some was so upsetting to others that they wished him broke or dead! What does it say about the message of this parable for us when we realize Jesus is calling God the Father the landowner and we are the laborers?

What really may bother us about this parable is God’s equal rewarding of latecomers and newcomers. We may be tempted to ask “What about us good Catholics?” Are we really going to be treated the same as the deathbed convert? And the answer is, Thank God, Yes!

The parable tells us that our heavenly reward is not something that we can earn, but rather a free gift from God. And what is a free gift from God, one that we cannot earn, but only can accept – Grace.

Grace is that “undeserved love” that God has shown us through the death and resurrection of His only Son Jesus Christ. And it is by His Grace; this gracious, undeserved love that God freely offers us, that we place our hope of spending all eternity in Heaven.

Let us all keep ourselves close to God through the grace He offers us in all His Sacraments, primarily the Eucharist and also the healing sacraments of reconciliation and the anointing of the sick. These three sacraments renew our relationship with God and give us the strength to live out the gifts of grace received through our Baptism and Confirmation, and also, Marriage and Holy Orders.

And let us thank God that our Father wants to treat us so generously as family, and not just as hired-hands!