

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 24, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call him while he is near.
Let the scoundrel forsake his way,
and the wicked his thoughts;
let him turn to the LORD for mercy;
to our God, who is generous in forgiving.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
As high as the heavens are above the earth,
so high are my ways above your ways
and my thoughts above your thoughts.

Psalm: Ps 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

R. (18a) The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

Every day will I bless you,
and I will praise your name forever and ever.
Great is the LORD and highly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.

R. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and of great kindness.
The LORD is good to all
and compassionate toward all his works.

R. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

The LORD is just in all his ways
and holy in all his works.
The LORD is near to all who call upon him,
to all who call upon him in truth.

R. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

Brothers and sisters: Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit.

Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16a

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o'clock, the landowner saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.' So they went off. And he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o'clock, the landowner found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.' When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat.' He said to one of them in reply, 'My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

I taught religion in grade school for a short semester when I was about 22. By accident I discovered a great trick of teaching—and I needed one very much. You see, the class was in complete chaos each time I arrived at mid-day. Chaos. If I started telling a story, even the simplest story, the pandemonium would cease and morph into rapt attention. You could hear a pin drop. Until the story ended, that is. Then anarchy resumed. I never did find another way besides stories to reach these little cherubs, even though I memorized each name and picture in the long list, called different ones out for serious talks, etc. There must be a special part of the brain devoted to story-hearing. It was only years later that I understood this insight. Why does the gospel get such special attention at Mass? Why do we hold the book up and parade it to the pulpit? Could it be because it is a story? We are struck by the narrative about Jesus, much more than we are by the sometimes complicated theology in Paul's letters. Jesus knew this. Within the gospels, which are stories, we find the parables he told. They are stories.

So take a good look at the parable in Sunday's Gospel and let the story lead you. Imagine the landowner hiring laborers for his vineyard. He shakes their rough hands and invites them to work. You can see their satisfied smiles, since they know they will get the usual daily wage. Day gets hotter and hotter. High noon has come. Maybe the owner walks back to town to shop for this and that. He glances around. Men are leaning on buildings, loitering, bored but still hopeful. The owner crosses over to them and offers to hire them. They come to life and hurry off to his vineyard to earn just half a day's wages. It is more than nothing. Then work is almost over. The owner is still in town, for whatever reason, and sees strong men lolling about in doorways, wet with sweat from the heat and from their dejection. To their surprise, he hires them too! Watch as they shake off their lethargy and go to pull weeds for an hour or so. This is a long walk for an hour's pay. But they go.

Day ends and "just wages" are handed out. But it is the exact same amount for every worker, no matter how many hours or how few minutes he had worked. Look at the faces, hot anger in the ones who had slaved all day ("This is not fair! We demand our rights! We put in the time and these oafs did nothing"), while the sheepish late ones receive their full day's wages. Let your imagination see the kindness in the owner's face. Call to mind the gloom of the ones hired so late, followed by their amazement. Obviously their wages are not strict remuneration for hours worked. They are more like a gift from a fond heart. How does this feel to you? Didn't Jesus tell his parable to show how God's caring heart works, how he gives a depth of love to each person in this world, especially to ones who suffer and are left behind? If it is hard to see, ask for light.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near." Can God always be near? Name some times in your day when it is easier to find God than at others. What helps you in your life to "find God in all things"?
2. Is there someone who "magnifies" the Lord for you? Every time you are around him or her, do you feel Christ somehow present? Why is that? What about them clears your eyesight?
3. This Gospel reading is not about strict justice but outrageous generosity. Are any of us, first hour worker or eleventh, ever worthy of grace, no matter what? What is the message of this parable? What is the message for you in your everyday life?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love of you and of our neighbor, grant that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen