

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
(Isaiah 55:6-9 / Matthew 20:1-16)  
20.09.2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

I don't know about you, but as far as I am concerned the parable we have just heard leaves me quite uncomfortable. At a first hearing, the behaviour of the landowner seems unfair to me. It does not seem quite right that all the workers – those who have worked the whole day in all the heat, those who have worked only part of the day, but especially those who have worked simply one hour – all receive the same wage, a denarius! But, having said that, I believe that each page of the sacred scriptures is good news from the Lord for us, and I believe that this parable is no exception to that rule. So, what is the good news in today's parable?

When we listen to a parable, the first thing to do is to search for and identify 'the key' for its understanding, that is to say the word or the verse which opens up the meaning of the parable for us. It seems to me that the key of today's parable are the words toward the end which read: "Why be envious because **I am generous?**" The fact that the landowner is generous, this is the key to our understanding of the parable.

It is the generosity of the landowner which explains his apparently capricious conduct. To understand the generosity of the landowner, it can help to know that a denarius represented a day's wage, that is to say just enough for the workman to eat and to support the basic needs of his family. Anything less than a denarius, – let us say the payment for a half day's work or even for a single hour – would not allow a worker to live. If the landowner hires workmen to go and work in his vineyard all the day long, it is obviously because some work needs to be done in his vineyard; but it is also because he is a generous man with a heart of flesh and a sense of solidarity with and compassion for all his brothers and sisters in humanity. For this reason, he pays all his employees a full day's wage. There is nothing unjust or arbitrary in the conduct of this landowner. What we see is the behaviour of a man full of compassion for the poor. The landowner of the parable is an image for Jesus who is well known for his preferential love for the poor.

With this landowner, we are immersed in the perspective of the kingdom of God which is different to that of this world. In the world, we are paid according to the work we have done. We gain what we merit. This is human justice. But in God's kingdom, human justice is topped up by divine mercy! In God's kingdom, we all receive the same wage, we are all loved and respected by God irrespective of what we do. We have not to buy our salvation by our works, even our good words; rather we are meant to receive it from God as a gift, and a gift is free or it is not a gift at all! Each one of us without exception is entitled to receive the gift of salvation from God because He created all of us out of love, so that we might have life.

We don't need to be rich, to have a good pedigree, to be qualified with many degrees, to have a special skin-colour, to be straight, to have blue eyes or red hair in order to be loved by God! God loves each one of us unconditionally, in a unique and personal way! It is not what we do or what we have that matters to God, but who we are! It is not the fact we have worked from daybreak or

from the eleventh hour that matters to the Lord, but the fact that we are a human being whom He created out of love! In God's kingdom we are all paid the same amount; we are all loved with the same love. The logic of the kingdom of God and the logic of the world are not the same.

If the landowner is generous – and we know that he is the image of Jesus –, so too we are invited to be generous with one another, to be as generous as Jesus is with us. We are called to love, serve, and respect – without counting – every human being who crosses our path. This is very exacting; it is even beyond our human abilities alone. For this reason it is something we will never manage to fulfil without the help of God's grace. It is something on which we will have to work again and again until our last breath relying on the Lord's help! There are people to whom we relate easily. There are others to whom we relate less spontaneously. We cannot succeed in loving our neighbour as God loves us with our own strength alone. We need God's help and we have to ask for it in prayer. God's grace will always be given to us, but often it will come in an unexpected, surprising way! Let us not forget that our God is a God of surprises!

If this parable irritates us each time we read it, perhaps this is the Lord's way to invite us to recognize that our hearts are not yet as generous as His. The Lord's purpose is not to develop a feeling of guilt within us, but to remind us that we are engaged on a journey, in a process. We have not yet arrived at life's end. We have still got a way to walk. We have still to ask the Lord in prayer for the grace of a generous heart. We have to welcome it, work on it and ask for it again and again. We have to accept that we are not God, but only his servants, called to become his humble servants. Lord, give us a generous heart, like yours!