

Homily for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A, 9/20/2020

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us a parable about workers. Although they all did not work the same number of hours, they are all being paid the same amount. Jesus asked a simple question to the workers but it is a difficult question: *"Are you envious because I am generous?"*

When we hear this question in the parable I think we would say **"yes"** and not **"no?"** Why? I think it is because to understand this parable we need to recall the original people to whom Matthew was writing his Gospel. This Gospel is mostly being addressed to Jewish Christians and it may reflect some resentment they may still have with Gentile Christians who enjoy all the benefits of their new Christian faith without the long Jewish tradition based on observance on the Law. It is also important to realize Jesus is not speaking about the social justice of the day. Jesus is speaking about the Kingdom of God which is based on a **covenant** between God and us. Our problem is, I think, that we are not sure of what a **covenant** is.

Perhaps, some definitions are in order. A **contract** is an agreement that people negotiate. The terms of the contracts are usually based on the simple idea of "quid pro quo," i.e. I do this work and you pay me a suitable amount for doing it. There is a sense of equality here. Think about any contract agreed upon for wages – for example, a contract for a teacher or a fireman.

A **covenant**, on the other hand, is an agreement God makes with us with no negotiations but based only on love. God simply gives to us out of divine love. It is not *"quid pro quo"* i.e. not a reward for our efforts but a free gift from God, inviting us to respond to his love in kind. Simply it is God who loves us and we respond to his love in return.

Our problem is that we may think of God as if he is our boss. A much better image of God is to think of God as the one who loves us. The grace of God is simply a gift to us, not something we have to earn, any

more than we have to earn the love of our mother or father. This love is a given and it is unconditional – no wonder Isaiah today tells us: *“My thought are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways.”*

Now, let us return to the parable. Perhaps, it is not so frustrating now. The workers who have labored all day are angry and say: *“You have made the late-comers equal to us who bore the heat of the day.”* This does not seem fair. But remember here Jesus is not speaking about fairness based on a contractual agreement but speaking on his generosity.

Perhaps, another way to look at this situation is to look at the **covenant** made on a wedding day. It is both a contract and a covenant because it is based both on law and on love. The vows read: *“I take you to be my husband/wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.* There is no counting the cost when one makes the commitment to love in marriage is there?

Let me give you an example. Imagine you are the parent of three children – a 19 year old, a 16 year old, and a 10 year old. Do you love the older children more than the youngest one? No! But, what if the 10 year old has serious needs and requires more of your attention than the others. Does this matter? Of course not! You rightfully say to all the children: *“We are a family and families are built on love.”* Again, we say this sort of thing because families are based not just on a contract but also on a covenant. It is an agreement based on love and you can't count the cost!

The Gospel parable ends with Jesus asking the question: *“Are you envious because I am generous?”* Our answer should be **“NO,”** God loves us for who we are! That is all we need to know. **Don't compare! Appreciate!**