

## **25<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (Cycle A)**

**September 18, 2005 – Catechetical Sunday – Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

You know, I can sympathize with the workers who arrived early in the vineyard. They agreed to a full day's wages, and they got a full day's wages, but when they saw what the latecomers got . . . hang on just a minute!

. . . 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.'

When I read this, the first thing I thought about was my kids. "Daddy, that's not FAIR!"

But then again, maybe that helped me see it from the landowner's perspective. I might not have been as polite as the landowner. I might have told the workers like I told my kids,

"Fair? FAIR?!? Kids, the only 'fair' I know anything about comes to Memphis at the end of September. They have a rodeo and a midway and a livestock show, and that's the only 'fair' I know anything about."

"Awwww, Daddy . . . ."

### **MOVE**

But you know, sometimes it does seem like life is unfair. The guys who worked a full day felt hurt, abused, cheated. They felt that they had been treated unfairly. Well, had they been treated unfairly? They got exactly what they had agreed to – a full day's pay for a full day's work. What could be fairer than that? But still they were grumbling about being treated unfairly.

So . . . who made them feel that they'd been treated unfairly? Not the landowner – he gave them exactly what they had agreed to. Not the other

workers who arrived later – they had no control over the situation and just took what was offered them. Certainly not me – I wasn't even there.

So who made the early arrivals feel hurt and abused? I think the answer is that they did it to themselves. It was their own resentment that hurt them. They hurt themselves by seeing themselves as victims of injustice when they really were not. It wasn't a zero-sum game – just because someone else gets a dollar more, that doesn't mean that I get a dollar less. They got what they agreed to, and that wasn't affected by what anybody else got. A lot of people seem to overlook that, even today.

## MOVE

Then again, we might wonder how the late arrivals felt. They only worked an hour or so, but got a full day's pay. The early arrivals worked all day in the hot sun and got the same pay. I wonder if the late arrivals felt guilty about it? Did they think they ought to give some of their money to the early arrivals, just to make it fair? Somehow, I think not.

Maybe a deeper meaning is, “don't get upset over anything as trivial as money.” That may sound strange coming from someone who doesn't *have* any money, but it's true nonetheless. The disgruntled workers thought someone else got a better deal, and they were jealous. And aren't most of us the same? Attachment to money and material possessions can be really distracting.

## MOVE

But the Gospel parable is about deliberate human decisions. What about random events, serious illness, accidents – and natural disasters, like Hurricane Katrina? Can we find any sense of “fairness” in there anywhere? Where is God in that?

Sometimes, when a random misfortune befalls a “bad person,” it's easy for us to think that God was somehow giving him his comeuppance. Even when a “bad person” comes out on top, I'm sometimes tempted to think,

“Well, it all goes on the wheel . . . and the wheel comes back around. He'll get his eventually.”

But when misfortunes befall us or those we love, it's different. It can be really hard to reconcile our faith in a loving God with serious illness, wounded relationships, love crucified, natural disasters.

Sometimes we try to make sense of it by trying to convince ourselves that we somehow deserved it. Maybe I did something I wasn't supposed to do, or failed to do something I was supposed to do. Maybe I had it coming. I don't deserve to have anything good happen to me. Good old Catholic guilt.

We heard all the usual pinheads analyzing Katrina. God smote that eeeeevil sinful French Quarter. It was the wrath of Allah on that eeeeevil infidel America. Some of the tinfoil-hat crowd even insisted that it was that eeeeevil George Bush's fault for not signing the Kyoto Agreement.

Nonsense. It was a random event.

MOVE

Sometimes we think maybe there's a deeper meaning, maybe God has a hidden purpose, or knows something we don't know. Maybe it's just a test, like what happened to Job. Maybe I'm supposed to learn something from it, but I just can't figure out what it is right now.

But this kind of thinking is based on the premise that God is the cause of our suffering, and that we can somehow understand why God would want us to suffer. But it's not that God wants us to suffer, and it's not that He wants us to learn something from our misfortunes. Personally, I think that there is such a thing as pure random chance. Sometimes, things just "happen," without asking God's permission or approval. I've heard it said that maybe there are simply dark corners of the universe where the love of God has not yet penetrated.

If there's anything we can learn from Hurricane Katrina, maybe it is that it let us see the best in people, and it let us see the worst in people, in the way they responded to it. I'm certainly not suggesting that that was the purpose of it, but if there's anything we can gain from it, maybe that's it.

MOVE

In the final analysis, our thoughts are not God's thoughts. Our ways are not God's ways. God's mercy and generosity and kindness and forgiveness really are beyond our comprehension. Even after years of hearing and studying Scripture, God's ways often remain mysterious to us. When life seems unfair, we search even more diligently to understand the mystery of God's ways, we seek the Lord while he may be found.

On this Catechetical Sunday, I might suggest that one way to do that is to take advantage of the many Adult faith formation opportunities available in our parish and in our Diocese. All of us should at least consider becoming involved in some form of on-going faith formation. I don't expect that it'll give us all the answers – sometimes there just aren't any answers – but at least it'll help us know what the questions are.

## READINGS

### Reading I

Is 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.

### Responsorial 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.**

### Reading II

Rom 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**

Mt 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.”