

Cycle A 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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."

Today's Scriptures tell us is that God loves us so much that He is merciful and generous. Many times we don't understand. Nevertheless we must respond by sharing His love with others so that God's kingdom lives.

With all the recent news about hurricane Irene and the flooding along the East coast, about the fires in Texas, and then the 10th anniversary of September 11 last week, I am sure many of you felt as I did, more than a little helpless and overwhelmed. We weren't even there, but seeing it on TV vividly reminded me of the flood my family experienced almost 40 years ago...where I learned 1st hand that what doesn't kill you will make you stronger....and that disasters can force us to take stock of what needs to be a priority in our lives...and that no matter how bad off we are, it helps us when we help others.

We were barely 9 months in our brand new 1st house and we didn't know many of our neighbors beyond a wave hello. Our first son Christopher was just 6 months old. Then one night the rains came....12 inches in 3 hours. The storm sewers weren't finished we found out later, so the high ground won. I have never felt so helpless as hearing the flood water pour over the foundation into the lower level family room and seeing it quickly rise toward the 1st floor. We soon abandoned the house and waded through waist deep water to a neighbor's house...my wife Pat with baby Christopher and me with the steel box holding important household papers. I soon determined that insurance wasn't going to cover our loss. The next morning two firemen came in a boat to rescue us...wouldn't you know it, I ended up in the middle, the rowing seat!! A friend who worked with me lived at the dry end of the block. They made us breakfast and then drove us 20 miles to my parent's house through some dicey flooded streets. Throughout this ordeal I realized that all I cared about was that my family was safe...strangely enough all the stuff we lost didn't bother me all that much....even days later when the water subsided, in the midst of the devastation I didn't feel an overwhelming loss. I remember being so tired of cleaning up our mess, and walking next store to get a reprieve by helping them out for a while or sharing a beer. As the

weeks and months went by we experienced nothing less than incredible mercy and generosity from God: strangers became life long friends, family showed up to help, and we didn't have to pay back a government loan that put us back on our feet. I learned 1st hand what was truly important and I thanked God for the safety of my family....over and over again. I learned that it wasn't all about me...the important priorities included my loving family and friends...and, it was important to have God in our lives.

When we hear today's Gospel parable, as always there is a "catch"....and, it is not obvious. If we think it is obvious and clear, then we are probably missing the point. Jesus' parables are meant to challenge our way of thinking about the world and God's desire for this world. In today's parable, we shouldn't focus on the workers. The story is about the landowner's loving heart. It is parable about God who so desires that we share life in His kingdom that He persistently invites us in. The kingdom is a gift that God is eager to share; in fact, more than eager, God is doggedly persistent in extending the invitation for salvation. Imagine the kindness of the owner as he repeatedly went out searching for workers and then paid everyone a full day's wage. Were the wages meant to be a fair payment for labor or were they purely a gift from a loving heart?

This matter of grace, this living in the kingdom of heaven that has already begun, is not necessarily rational to us. It is not that God is more merciful than we might be, or more forgiving. You see, God does not even think the way we do. As Isaiah reminds us, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts." Of course, God starts from a different place. God's actions do not spring from need, unless it is the need to give. The whole point of God's love is in giving. We needy humans, however, act basically out of want. It is understandable that we perceive things in terms of fulfilling our needs. And so it is easy for us to focus on the difference of how the workers were treated and think how unfair life is, rather than recognize the gift given by the landowner.

God's bountiful gift of mercy and salvation is neither earned nor deserved. The mercy that Jesus extends even to us sinners who may only respond to His call in the final hour is a gift which characterizes God's kingdom. God deals mercifully with everyone, and salvation is offered for all to accept.

In his book Searching for God at Ground Zero, Father James Martin tells a story that happened on the 3rd day of the nearly 30 days he spent at the wreckage of World Trade Center in September 2001. That afternoon he met a retired policeman who had come to Ground Zero to offer his services. "Look up that way," the man said, pointing north where the brilliant sun glittered on the Hudson river, "It's beautiful isn't it?" "Now look over there," he said pointing behind him at the still smoldering rubble pile, "It's hard to believe it is the same world." Then the old cop said, "God would not want any of this destruction, but God has brought every one of us together here. It is the work of the Holy Spirit." Many times I have heard the commentary about 9/11 mention the over 3,000 lives lost that day, including 343 brave firefighters. Last weekend however, I heard another figure that stunned me...the people working in the ruins of Ground Zero during the months and years after 9/11 numbered over 70,000! And now over 15,000 of them are paying a terrible price with debilitating health issues...some need to have caregivers help them. These people made sure God's kingdom lives.

Today let us recognize the bountiful mercy and generosity that God's loving heart is giving to people across America, in Texas; Vermont; New York; Washington, DC; and Shanksville, PA; through all the workers, the volunteers, the donations and in fact through each other. Let us pray as hard as we can for them and then let us pray asking God what you and I, the Body of Christ, can do for others. For you see, there are many people hurting right here in South Forsyth County, in our families, or among our friends. It will be through us and our ministries here at St. Brendan's that many, many other people will experience the mercy and generosity of God. We make sure God's kingdom lives.