

Twenty Fifth Sunday

My beloved brothers and sisters, the story that Jesus tells us about the extremely generous vineyard owner, was rooted in the experience of the people of the Galilee. When the fruit harvest began, they would literally pick the fruit from dawn to dusk, and wealthy landowners would go into the public square to hire workers. Remember, they did not have refrigeration. The only way to preserve the harvest, was to dry the grapes into raisins, or to make wine. Nonetheless, they had to do the harvesting with great speed, lest the crop become useless by rotting or spoiling. However, while it was not so unusual to hire additional farm workers, it was amazing to see the extreme generosity of the landowner in this gospel! Jesus is the generous landowner in this gospel story, and the lesson that He wants us to know and understand, is that His generosity and love go beyond our wildest expectations.

One of the greatest difficulties we are experiencing in our post-Christian society in America and Europe, is not only the radical decline of Christianity; but also, many who claim to be Christians, even those who are coming to church, have no personal relationship with God! Many who are coming to Church in the U.S. and Europe, have an idea of God, that is profoundly distorted- it is not at all the reality of God that Jesus is and Whom He shows us in Himself! Many people think of God as an old man, with a long beard, who is at best, cranky and waiting to smack us for the least wrongdoing; that is their idea of God. Many people believe that God is mean, that He is completely unconcerned with our lives and with the world. This is not that reality of the God that Jesus shows us! No wonder people fall away!

This is the reason why in the first reading, God says to us: “My thoughts are not your thoughts; my ways are not your ways....” To pay hired workers at the end of the day, the same rate as those who worked throughout the 10 hour days of the harvest, is to pay these workers, 10 x’s the amount that would normally be paid to them! It is simply because the landowner is extreme in his generosity and deeply concerned about their welfare, because these are the poorest of the poor! The fact that there were workers still waiting for labor, even at the last of the day,

tells us this: they needed even the tiny amount that would normally be paid, in order not to go hungry that night! Only a very generous man would hire them at the end of the day; only a fool would pay them 10 X's the normal amount! That is the point: God's mercy and love for us, is boundless, and infinitely generous!

This has been my experience of God's love for me! God has lavished me with His infinite generosity and love! God has been so good to me, even though I know that I have often been disappointing to Him! God is so merciful to me, even though I know that I do not deserve His mercy! God is so good! And His infinite goodness and mercy are so visible for us, if we open up our hearts and eyes to that goodness! I am so constantly amazed at that goodness and mercy visible in our parish! I tell you often how much I love you all; but, when I had the heart incident, I personally saw that goodness and mercy and love poured out upon me! The nurses said to me: Father, we have been inundated with phone calls from your people wanting you to know how much they love you and how concerned they are for you! Look at all of the good that Jesus is doing in this parish! Look at how alive and wonderful is this parish! Look at all of the people who are engaged in the daily life of this parish- who are so incredibly self-giving in serving the people of the parish and our community as well! If I began to list everything going on, it would blow your socks off!

So- the question for us all is simple: how are we responding to this infinite love and generosity of our God?