

Time and Talent Festival of Ministries Invite

[Readings: Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 145; Philip 1:20c-24, 27a; Matt 20:1-16a]

My favorite line of today's Gospel is the last one: "The last shall be first and the first shall be last." Throughout my youth and young adulthood, we were always lined up according to height or alphabet, so guess who always was the "caboose?"

When Jesus tells a parable, he often tells a zinger of a story. Today is no exception. Almost anyone would admit that today's parable is both irritating and puzzling. Why does the landowner pay everyone the same wage regardless of how long they have worked? If I worked the full day, wouldn't I think that I deserved more pay than those who worked only one hour? Wouldn't YOU? Of course, we would! And wouldn't we feel a little irritated and wonder what Jesus is up to, maybe even wonder what He might be teaching us?

Each worker had an agreement with the landowner – one day's wage. Others were told they would get a just wage. If they all had this understanding, why can't the owner do what he wants, pay what he wants, as long as he is just?

Are we irritated because we put ourselves in the place of those day-long workers and think that we are superior and deserving of more because we bore the heat of the day and because the others came later to work? And if this thinking makes US superior, doesn't it make them INFERIOR?

It's never too early. It's never too late. Maybe the thoughts of Jesus are not our thoughts. Isaiah says that in today's First Reading: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." We might be competitive and envious of others. But God isn't that way. God doesn't compete. God does not envy. God's ways are merciful, forgiving and generous.

This parable has nothing to do with work and wages. It has to do with faith. The Jewish people have lived and taught and waited for the coming of the Messiah and the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. They have been faithful to their culture and tradition for thousands of years --"dawn." But many still are

not ready, willing or able to accept the Good News that Jesus brings.

So Jesus offers salvation to the Gentiles – those who have come along at “nine o’clock,” “noon,” “three o’clock” and “five o’clock.” Those who arrive later on the scene. It’s never too early. It’s never too late.

So what do we do? We look to St. Paul in our Second Reading for some help. Living in a way worthy of the Gospel of Christ means taking the lessons of the parables of Jesus seriously. This means that God does not depend on what we do, or how much we do, or on our station in life, when God gives us our blessings. God doesn’t follow our incomplete ideas of justice, but gives gratuitously and generously, regardless of our worthiness.

All of us are equally dependent on God’s generosity and love. God’s love and generosity cannot be matched or outdone. Our only response, our only option, once we choose to become a Christian believer, is stewardship. Stewardship is what we do with what we have when we believe. Stewardship is what we do with what we have when we love God as God loves us.

Once upon a time, a judge in probate court was surprised when he read the complaints. Before him sat four people who were the adult children of a recently deceased multi-millionaire. The older two siblings were contesting the will -- a very generous will. What was their gripe?

“We were his children longer than these other two who didn’t come along until 10 and 12 years later. We feel that since we were our father’s children longer, we ought to get a higher percentage of his estate.”

The judge sat and thought that one over for a few minutes. Then, shaking his head, he said, “What, are you goofy? Your father gave you everything that he had. It’s a very generous settlement, with no strings attached and all taxes pre-paid. You all get equal shares of his great wealth and you come in here complaining because one of you was born 10 years earlier than the other?”

God gives us everything in His power to give: Life itself, the ability to learn and grow and love, and eternal happiness in heaven.

And yet we often find it easy to complain because of what we perceive we don't have, or that someone has more than us or should get less. To quote the judge, "What, are we goofy?" It's never too early. It's never too late.

When we stop to think of it this way, there is another twist to the Gospel parable. Some of us were called by Jesus in our infancy and we have been faithful followers. Others were called in our youth, while still others of us received our spiritual awakening or re-awakening in our maturity, even in our old age.

It's never too early. It's never too late.

No matter when Jesus called us to be His disciples, we all know others who were called later on in their lives. Should the reward be any different for any of these disciples of Jesus depending on when they answered His call?

If I lived a sinful and reckless life during the first half of my life and then lived a virtuous life the second half, should I receive less love from the Lord? Perhaps you know someone who lived such a life and now is a faithful Catholic. Should he or she be loved less, have a lesser salvation from God? God isn't like that. "So high are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above yours."

That is what Jesus is telling us. God's love and salvation are available to all people, no matter when they saw the light, when they sought the Lord for the first time for themselves, when they let go of the ways of the scoundrel and sinner. For it isn't by our own merit that we receive God's mercy and love; it is by the sheer generosity and grace of God's love. It is free, generous and amazing.

Next weekend is our Festival of Ministries. Last celebrated five years ago for our parish fiftieth anniversary. I ask each one of you, not just the person sitting next to you, not the next person who will come to the next Mass, but YOU! YOU: don't stand idle all day. You, too, go into my vineyard." Here to tell us where you can help is Mrs. Renee' Heileman, our Christian Service Director.

This present life may be what gets us to Heaven, if we live it faithfully, generously and with love. Accept the invitation to our Festival of Ministries. "Come and see" what the Lord is calling you to in ministry and service to the Gospel. It's never too early. It's never too late! AMEN!