

REFLECTION

My Ways are not your Ways and my Thoughts not your Thoughts

Our readings today call our attention to the special character of God's justice. This line from the book of Isaiah summarizes it very well: "As the heavens are high above the earth, so are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Is 55:9). It is well demonstrated in the parable that is given to us today from the Gospel of Matthew (20:1-16).

The Parable of *The Workers in the Vineyard* is found only in Matthew's Gospel. It continues the theme of the nature of God's Kingdom which we have been reflecting on in the past few weeks. The context evoked by the parable is that of a Jewish marketplace where workers went daily to be hired. Those familiar with early to mid-1900s would remember that the work marketplace was the way most ordinary people made their living. Workers gathered in a common place where they let everyone know they were ready to work on a daily basis. Often workers were selected by the calling of names. And sometimes the workers would have to bribe the foreman to have their name enter the list. Consequently, a lot of people were left behind with no work for the day and no means of earning their living.

It is in this context that the landowner in the Parable goes out to hire labourers. But we notice something quite unusual. First, the landowner himself would never go out in search of the labourers, rather he would send out his foreman who would organise the labour. Second, it is quite unusual for the hirer to go out at different times of the day to bring in labourers: the first ones at dawn, then at 9.00am, 12 noon, 3.00pm and at 5.00pm, everyone then got paid at 6.00pm beginning with the laborers who started work at 5.00pm. All the labourers received one denarius each including those who began working at 6.00am. This clearly deviates from our usual sense of justice and fairness.

What does this tell us about God and the vineyard? God's vineyard is the new Christian community which grew out of Jesus, and it is governed by the rule of love. Everyone who has indicated their willingness to work with God is hired, and it is of no consequence when the person starts working. Hence, the reward for labouring in God's vineyard is the same, whether you begin at dawn, midday or evening. This is because the reward due for working with God is given out of God's generosity rather than merit. Our work in God's vineyard is a response to his love for us rather than one that is done for any future reward.

God asks us to measure our work with him qualitatively rather than quantitatively. We hear St Paul emphasizing this in our second reading. For him life or death makes no difference insofar as Christ is glorified in him. Working on earth for the Gospel is just as fulfilling as dying and being with Jesus. The kingdom of God that Jesus has inaugurated therefore operates by a new value system – one that is concerned about taking care of others, letting others in and loving them. It is one that is judged not by how long but how well we have loved others.

God's ways are different from our ways and his thoughts different and higher than our thoughts. He invites us to come to him that he may teach us the secret of happy living. Rather than grumble because of our sense of justice and fairness, gratitude and thanksgiving bring us peace and joy and an appreciation of the gifts God bestows on us and others.

NOTICES

1. The 2020-2021 year of preparations for Holy Communion and Confirmation will start in October. Those who wish to receive any of these sacraments in the next year can contact the parish (catechism.co-ordinator@carmelitechurch.org) for registration. Due to the present circumstances, classes will be held in the safest way, most likely online, but this will be determined together with the participants.
2. We are committed to keeping everyone who comes to worship with us safe. Please continue to keep a safe distance and wear face masks while in the church. Do follow the directives given by our volunteers as you enter the Church regarding sitting arrangements and queuing for Holy Communion.
3. As we thank you for your generosity to the church even at this time, we continue to ask for your support for the church to cater for those in need who come to us. Offering boxes are located at the back of the church; Standing Order and Gift-Aid forms are also at the back of the church.
4. Collection last Sunday: £1,164
PenaFrancia Celebration: £471

Standing Orders in August: £1,950
Gift Aid Donations in August: £1,123

Many Thanks.

5. To celebrate its 90th year of existence the Society of Catholic Artists has an online exhibition of both religious and secular works. The society was started in celebration of 100 years of Catholic Emancipation in England. The link to this beautiful exhibition which can be shared is: <http://www.catholicartists.co.uk/90years>

Signed:

Fr. Thaddeus Ekuma, ocd