

TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY, YEAR A (Is.55:6-9, Ps.145, Phil.1:20-24,27 & Matt.20:1-16)

**THEME: CALLED TO THE VINEYARD AT DIFFERENT TIMES**

At different stages of our lives, we all discover the person of Jesus and follow him in our Christian vocation. Some discovered him very early in their lives, some at the mid time of their lives and still others very later in their lives, after so many years of 'idle living'. Whichever time you discover Him, the good news remains that, God in his graciousness embraces everyone with equal love and generosity irrespective at whatever time one discovers Him in one's life.

Unfortunately, there are some people or class of people who claim that they are the first comers, foundation members of the Church and therefore, arrogate more rights of benefit to themselves over others whom they think are **late comers to the faith** and should not share equal rights with them. In the gospel reading of this Sunday, therefore, Jesus uses a brilliant parable to teach us something radically different from the above misconception.

Jesus throws a parable about the kingdom of heaven, in which a landowner hired several groups of labourers at five different times of the day, to work in his vineyard **and at the end of the day the landowner paid all the labourers equally, neither according to the hours they put in nor the measure of work they have done but according to his arbitrary generosity.** This arbitrary generosity of the landowner shocks some of the labourers who were hired quite earlier, that they began to complain, **Matt.20:1-16.**

Humanly speaking those first group of labourers in the above parable may have a point complaining one would say, **but Jesus relates the parable in order to delete the deep-rooted and erroneous notion in some people that, salvation (God's love) is something we merit by the works we do. Not at all.** Salvation is never something we can earn or merit, it is rather given gracefully and freely by God. That is why no person, class of people or nationality can lay exclusive claim to it by virtue of birth, ability or merit, irrespective of when one embraces the faith.

By way of application, each group of the hired labourers in the parable represents our individual selves, our respective families, our ethnic groups and nations. Some of us have been '**summoned to the vineyard**' that is, discovered

the person of Christ and embraced the Christian faith long ago, while others embraced Him quite later. Irrespective of when anyone embraces the Christian faith, none of us is the owner of the 'vineyard' (the Church) but only God and we are all labourers. And no one or class has any claim to be treated by God better than other people. Rather, God graciously treats everyone equally in his kingdom, provided you respond to his summon, cooperate with his grace and remain faithful to the end.

Therefore, all who embraced the faith and are inside the Church before others, and perhaps laid the foundation and built the altar, **MUST** allow other '**later comers**' to come in on equal terms. No one has more merit than the other. The person who lives an almost saintly life and the person who lives a life of sinfulness without regard for God but who later in life or on the death bed repents, both would receive the same reward -Heaven.

It suffices then to say that, all should just be happy and grateful for the honour of being called to work with Christ and for Christ in our Christian vocation. Most often our jealousy blinds us from seeing why we should be grateful to God for our Christian/religious vocation. That is really the blame of those labourers who were summoned first to the vineyard in the parable. Their jealousy blinds them from being grateful to the landowner who employed them, but they rather resort to complaining enviously.

Therefore, for all children of God and Christian believers, no person has more right to be a child of God than the others. Hence, in every Christian family, parents should see it that, no child should be accorded more rights over other children of the same family. And the same should as well be obtainable in every religious community in the Church because the **Lord in his arbitrary generosity summons us all at different times to His vineyard.**

In sum, the underlying message of the above parable calls us to serve God with gratitude in our Christian vocation and as well welcome with joy the repentant sinner, regardless of how long it takes them to repent. The most important thing for us all is to remain faithfully serving the Lord to the end. Giving the Lord the first place in your life and allowing His gospel message and teaching to determine your daily decisions and life choices, as you serve Him with gratitude and cheerfulness because He rewards each and every one of us gratuitously irrespective of when you discovered and embraced Him in your Christian vocation.