



## EXEGESIS

### 1<sup>st</sup> Reading, IS 55:6-9

In previous oracles, Isaiah has challenged people to replace idolatry with service to God. He holds up for their admiration the ideal servant of God who gave his life to heal the wounds of so many others (Is 53). At one time, these others were inclined to dismiss such a servant as insignificant. Now, they recognize what benefits they have gained by his sacrifice. Taking full advantage of this spiritual awakening, the prophet urges people to proceed further along the path of life.

1) *Repentance.* The people have arrived at a critical point in the spiritual journey. At last, their awareness of God's purpose for them has been "found." Isaiah urges them not to let this moment slip away. They should now seek God out and call upon God to help them grow stronger. The first step is sincere repentance exhibited by forsaking the way of the wicked. The reading describes the wicked person as a "scoundrel," a term suggesting someone who has no care for others. This fits well Isaiah's summons to attend to the least fortunate in society, the widow and the orphan of Isaiah 1:17.

2) *God's ways.* People should never hesitate turning back to God. God, says the prophet, is "generous in forgiving." This is not the way of the world. Mortals, limited by earthly concerns, may not be inclined to forgive so readily. But God has no such limitations. As this oracle strongly states, the ways of God are as high above human ways as the heavens are above the earth. So, Isaiah encourages people to turn their hearts toward God in the heavens.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, Phil 1:20c-24, 27a

1) *Service to God.* Paul is fully dedicated to the Lord. While alive in this world he is engaged in fruitful labor. And if he dies he will be with Christ.

2) *And others.* Paul is devoted to the people of faith in Philippi. They need to hear him proclaim the Gospel. It guides them along the path of life.



## **Gospel, Mt 20: 1-16a**

This parable is traditionally designated as "the workers in the vineyard." However, a close reading of the parable shows that the main character is the landowner. This is a story about his actions and reactions with day laborers he has hired throughout the day. Keep in mind that this is a parable and not a document on fair labor practices. In fact, the focus of the parable is on the last judgment. What will happen when that time comes? Should we be afraid of that last judgment, or should we await it with joyful expectation? That is the parable's main concern.

1) *The landowner.* The first half of the parable describes a landowner hiring dayworkers for his field throughout the day (9:00 a.m.; 3:00 p.m.; 5:00 p.m.). We are not told why he needed so many workers at these various times. All of these workers agreed to receive "the usual daily wage." Ordinarily, this would be a denarius (a Roman coin). So far everything seems to be in order and the landowner gets his workers and the day laborers have work. The landowner seems generous and the laborers are pleased to have been hired.

2) *The payment.* All of this changes in the second half of the parable where the paying of the workers is described. Day laborers usually received their pay at the end of each day, and such is the case here. However, the usual manner of issuing pay was to start from the first hired and end with the last. This landowner does just the opposite so that the first hired can see how much pay those hired last received. Each worker received the same amount of pay regardless of how long he had worked. This was the amount each agreed to. Those hired first, however, felt strongly that they should have received more than those hired last. After all, they worked longer. The landowner rightly declares that he has done nothing wrong and nothing not agreed to by all. He accuses the grumblers of resenting his generosity toward those who only worked a few hours. When did generosity become a sin?

3) *This parable.* This parable is really about how God will act at the final judgment. The landowner's vineyard is a symbol for Israel. The good news is that God will be generous. The last will be first, and the first will be last but it will not matter. God's mercy and generosity will extend to all in the vineyard.



## HOMILY CONNECTIONS

**CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING:** "...work is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of the human being and to the development of society. Thus it must be organized and carried out with full respect for human dignity and must always serve the common good. At the same time, it is indispensable that people not allow themselves to be enslaved by work or idolize it, claiming to find in it the ultimate and definitive meaning of life." *Pope Benedict XVI **Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist**, 2007 no 74*

"The rights of workers, like all rights, are based on the nature of the human person and on his transcendent dignity. The Church's social Magisterium has seen fit to list some of these rights, in the hopes that they will be recognized in juridical systems: the right to a fair wage; the right to rest; the right to 'working environments and to manufacturing processes which are not harmful to the workers' physical health or to their moral integrity';...the right to a pension and to insurance for old age, sickness..." *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 301.*

**SUMMARY:** Both the second reading and the Gospel refer to work or workers. Paul understands that his work, is holy and necessary in cooperating with the Divine to build God's kingdom. The Gospel describes the relationship between the land-owner and the workers, with the owner striking a bargain with workers and then surprising them with his generosity; A reflection of God's extravagant love for us and a recognition of the role of the worker in tending his garden/building his kingdom

**ATTENTION-GETTER:** In the past several months as we struggled to deal with the global pandemic of Covid 19 there was a lot of fear and uncertainty. Workers providing essential services, including cleaning personnel grocery clerks, first responders and health care workers have become the heroes of the present age. On one occasion, years before the current troubles, the beloved children's show host Mr. Rogers, told his audience of children where to find



comfort and reassurance. He said " *"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of 'disaster,' I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world."*

**APPLICATION:** Generosity is one of the basic characteristics of our loving God. If we follow the teachings and actions of Jesus, we can never adopt policies or take actions that are "too generous."

- 1) God's thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways.
  - a) We can call on God at any time because God is with us always.
  - b) No matter what we do or believe, no matter how much of a scoundrel we may be, we can turn to God for mercy.
  - c) God's mercy and forgiveness are beyond our comprehension.
  - d) We are called to imitate God in his generosity, love and mercy.
  
- 2) Paul was torn between a desire to continue living in service to others or to be eternally united with God.
  - a) While we have no reason to fear death, our lives are of great value.
  - b) Despite the knowledge that we will live forever with God, we are called to live lives of witness and service.
  - c) We remain alive because of God's plans for us and God's ability to use us in service to the Gospel and the kingdom.
  
- 3) Jesus taught a lesson about God's generosity through one of his parables.
  - a) Jesus tells the story of a man who owned a vineyard as a metaphor for the way we can expect God to treat people.
  - b) The vineyard owner called on people at various times and wherever they happened to be.
  - c) At the end of the day, the landowner paid all the workers the same amount, no matter what time they began working.
  - d) Those who worked all day had a hard time understanding the landowner's action and were quite vocal about what they considered unfair treatment.



- e) Jesus used the story to demonstrate God's generosity in rewarding all people in the same way.
- 4) We can never understand the love and generosity of God.
  - a) God's unconditional love is beyond our understanding. God transcends our concepts of reward and punishment and even what we call "justice."
  - b) While we all benefit from God's generosity and unconditional love, God calls on believers to treat others the same way.
  - c) When we adopt such a "godly" attitude, we will transform this world into the kingdom that Jesus promised.
- 5) The workers in the vineyard provided an essential service to the landowner. Their work had inherent dignity.

**TRANSITION TO THE LITURGY OF EUCHARIST** As we prepare to receive the real presence of Jesus in the bread and wine, fruit of the earth, and the work of human hands, we, recognize the transforming power of Jesus that you hold in your hands.

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