

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
24th September 2023 - 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year A): 1st: Isaiah 55:6-9. 2nd: Philippians 1:20-24,27. Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16.

Probably not the easiest gospel to choose for the TUC Congress: and yet properly understood, as ever with the gospel it is right and challenging. The clue to its understanding comes from the 1st reading from Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways are not your ways – it is the Lord who speaks. Yes, the heavens are as high above earth as my ways are above your ways, my thoughts above your thoughts.”

And from the Gospel: “why be envious because I am generous?” Through this parable Jesus unveils the clash between the mind tied to earthly values and the mind that has soared up to God’s values. It is an instance of how the thoughts of God are on a higher scale than our earthly thoughts.

What Jesus is saying is in the last instance everything is a generous gift from God. That is what the kingdom of God is like. This parable does not concern wages, in spite of its setting. It is, like most if not all the parables, about God’s kingdom.

Those who have had the privilege of working for him longest should not begrudge his full acceptance of those who, for whatever reason, are late coming to his service.

This shows that God’s heart is so full of love that he *wants* to pour out his gifts on all who will accept them.

The reaction of some of the labourers shows us that generosity does not always go down well with everyone. Our human earthly mind respects fair play. ‘It ain’t fair Miss’, heard in many a classroom I have often spoken about.

It comes into play in this with the labourers who came first and expected to get much more. They grumbled. Sins of envy and jealousy come in to play. Jealousy is shown by the first workers.

However understandable their sense of grievance, their feelings of injustice do not take into account the needs of the workers who were hired later in the day to feed themselves and their families.

Their envy of the good fortune of others is disappointing, and contrasts with the generosity of the landowner. His actions are intended to demonstrate God’s compassion and munificence towards all.

Everything is a gift from God and no one has an *a priori* right to anything. We should be thankful for what we have, and not complain about what we haven’t been given.

For the parable is about the great noble mind which makes the landowner generous beyond justice. He chooses to give more than some earned.

The calculators come out, the sums are done and the small mind starts to grumble. The lesson being hit home is not to restrict God to our little calculations. The mind of God works on a greater and more generous scale than we do.

The message that God’s ways are high above our ways retains its relevance for all who are tempted to restrict God’s movements and power to our human calculations.

It is good to recall St John Henry Newman’s words, that will be part of the Day of Recollection in Buckfast arranged by the Catenians for anyone to go to (the note of that is in this week’s newsletter).

Newman said” God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nought. I shall do good: I shall do his work.”