

September 24, 2017

Is 55:6-9; Phil 1:20c-24,27a; Mt 20:1-16a

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call to him while he is still near ... turn to the Lord for mercy. God continues to send out the invitation for us to turn from the things that we do in life that fail to ultimately satisfy. God longs to welcome us into the peace that he provides to those who find the way to the harvest by listening to the divine voice and faithfully laboring in the vineyard. The prophet Isaiah in the first reading speaks as God's messenger to all of us pleading for us to "Seek the Lord and find him ... while he is still near." What exactly does that last part mean, isn't God always near?

The Gospel reading helps us to understand: In the parable we hear about a landowner who goes out to hire workers. He goes to the marketplace several times during the course of the day, making the same invitation, each time that invitation is accepted by another group of workers. At the end of the day the generosity of the landowner (who represents God) is clear. Everyone gets the full wage - no matter how long they worked - as long as they follow him to the harvest. So it does not matter when you accept the call to worship God (as we are doing at Mass today), to be united to God in Jesus Christ, and live as God taught - as long as you accept it at some point - your good - so why rush? Can't I just do what I want for a while, I can think of better things to do than go to church every Sunday, and to mold my life to care for myself and my brothers and sisters as Jesus taught - I just need to do me! St. Augustine says that although you can be sure to get the pay that is coming as long as you eventually go to the vineyard with the Lord, this is no permission to put it off. Well then, what's the downside of waiting - why not put it off, especially since God is always there?

Let's take another look at the Gospel: So the landowner goes to the marketplace and offers a job to the people waiting there. A group goes with him the first time - but don't forget that there are people who turn down the work - that's why there still are people there when he goes back the other three times. It is the same group of people that he keeps going back to. He keeps offering them what they need to survive, promising them that if they go to the vineyard he will *give [them] whatever is just*. Each time he goes back more and more of the people take the offer. Why did some of them wait? Maybe because they were holding out for a better offer. Maybe they were waiting for another employer come by and offer them a different kind of work, something that they would like better. Maybe they were too engrossed in talking, or gossiping, or partying - and the thought of leaving this fun for a day of work seemed lousy. Maybe they were

just plain lazy. Or maybe they were too depressed about their situation to believe the wonderful thing being offered. The fact was that they ALL needed that day's pay - they wouldn't have been hanging in the marketplace if they had a job or were rich (this was how jobless people of the day got work) - they probably didn't have money for the rent or to buy food. People of Jesus' time would have thought that to refuse to go when called was foolish: "So your poor and need a job, but your turning down work and will starve tonight - what's the matter with you?" "Why would you loose everything just because you wouldn't go?" "What are you waiting for?"

Maybe the saddest group of all are those who turned down the offer the last time the master came by - the final invitation. They probably thought "what's the point, I waited too long, I never got hired, now I blew it - it's not worth it to go over for an hour." They stayed in the cold in the marketplace as the night fell - hungry and isolated while the last group went off to get a full reward. *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call to him while he is still near* - in other words, don't put it off too long, there will be a time when it will be too late. Not that God is not there waiting and would ever refuse mercy (I'll bet if one of those final guys from the marketplace changed his mind and ran to the vineyard and got there five minutes before the pay line formed, the master would have told him to get in line and get paid). The danger is that we wait so long that we never actually wind up going - we get so engrossed in the things of the world that we never get around to fully accepting God's invitation. St. Paul tells us that for him *life is Christ and death is gain* - there is nothing in this world that we can obtain the replaces the peace we can have by being close to Christ in this life; and there is no wealth or possessions or fame that can travel with us after death or bring us to the joys of life with God in heaven.

God's invitation is given to us today. He spreads the banquet of his Body and Blood and asks us to share in it. To fully accept that invitation means to open our inner self so that in Communion we receive him in a way that transforms us and opens our minds to what he is saying, and gives us the strength we need through the week to weather life's struggles, and to be faithful workers in the vineyard. Not that all problems will go away, but we gain strength to endure, and we have a greater purpose from God to work towards. We all sometimes feel like turning the other way when things get tough, and we all can become too engrossed in life events, to lazy, to depressed, to confused to accept the invitation. If we accept it, and are faithful to what God asks, we may find something we want to tell others about. We may even find ourselves so fulfilled in our search that we turn back towards the marketplace and say to those who may wait too long: *Seek the Lord while He may be found, call to him while he is still near!*