

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – 9/24/17

My dear people of God:

Today's readings are so strong and powerful that we must allow ourselves to be touched by them. I find myself appreciating how Saint Paul interiorized not only the teachings of Christ, but the very person of Christ. Allow me then to start our reflection with the second reading which is from the letter of Paul to the Philippians: *“Brothers and sisters: Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit. Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.”*

Obviously, Paul knew that his life, whether spent in this world or in heaven would magnify Christ. His total self-commitment to Christ made Paul more open to what Christ had designed him for His own divine purposes. However, Paul said that if only he had his way, he would love to remain with the Philippians just to be able to guide them. Since he could not be with them, he enjoined them to conduct themselves worthy of the gospel of Christ. Such injunction of Paul is simply his own way of telling them what he knew: that the LORD is just in all His ways and holy in all His works; that the LORD is near to all who call upon Him. This we heard already in the Responsorial Psalm. At this very moment, Paul is repeating those words to us: “conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

“If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me”. St. Paul has words many people can identify with: He longs to be with Christ. That would mean freedom from the cares, trials and pains of this life. He desires to be with Christ.

Brothers and sisters: For us, this fruitful labor includes physical tasks: studying God's Word. It includes organizing, talking to people and encouraging them. Above all, fruitful labor means prayer and suffering: physical ailments, emotional distress, loneliness and opposition. All of these

constitute fruitful labor for God and His Church. We can experience something similar when we join our lives to Jesus. We see it in the work done right here in our parish. But, let us still imitate Saint Paul.

An anonymous author on the internet wrote it smartly this way:

*Funny how a \$10 looks so big when you take it to church;
but so small when you take it to the mall.*

*Funny how long it takes to serve God for an hour;
but how quickly a team plays 60 minutes of basketball.*

*Funny how long is an hour when spent at church;
but how short when watching a movie.*

*Funny how we can't think of anything to say when we pray;
but don't have difficulty thinking of things to talk about to a friend.*

*Funny how we get thrilled when a baseball game goes into extra innings;
but we complain when a sermon is longer than the regular time.*

*Funny how hard it is to read a chapter in the Bible;
but how easy it is to read e-mail or text messages.*

*Funny how people want to get a front seat at any game or concert;
but scramble to get a backseat at church services.*

*Funny how we need 2 or 3 weeks advance notice to fit a church event into our
schedule; but can adjust our schedule for a last minute party.*

*Funny how hard it is for people to learn a simple gospel well enough to tell
others; but how easy it is for the same people to understand and repeat gossip.*

*Funny how we believe what the newspaper says; but question what the Bible
says.*

*Funny how we want to go to heaven provided we do not have to believe, or think,
or say, or do anything.*

Funny how we can send a thousand jokes through e-mail and they spread like wildfire; but when we start sending gospel messages how many on our list are not receiving it because we are not sure they believe in anything, and we decide not to send them at all.

Funny, isn't it?

Let us spread the WORD and give thanks to the LORD for HE is GOOD! We only have ONE life, let us live it to the fullest.

Let me go to the first reading now: I love the way the Liturgy of the Word started. We heard from the first reading: *“Seek the LORD while he may be found, call him while he is near. Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked his thoughts; let him turn to the LORD for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.”*

The first reading would help us understand the gospel more deeply. It would preempt us from making a wrong conclusion that the landowner mentioned in the gospel is unjust; unfair.

Please recall that last Sunday, Jesus taught us to forgive our offender without limit. Today, he is teaching us why: because God is generous. Hence we should not be envious of others and that we should not compare ourselves with others. We should count our blessings.

Now, let us go to the gospel. This parable is found only in Matthew. Mark, Luke, and John did not mention it. The laborers of the parable were the lowest class of Jewish workingmen. The parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, tells us that God is far more gracious than men. It is encouraging us to realize that we do not have the right to make either judgments or comparisons in the realm of spiritual affairs.

The Gospel of Matthew was written primarily to Christians who were Jewish converts from Judaism to Christianity. For ages these were the Chosen People. Their ancestors had fought and suffered to preserve their faith in Yahweh. Now, as Christians, they were thrown out of the synagogue, they were rejected by their own people. They had suffered much for the Lord. They had suffered for ages, and were suffering still.

But when this gospel was written, there were many others who did not have an ancestral history of fighting for their faith, but who embraced Christianity. Their ancestors were Gentiles or pagans. Gentiles were being called into the salvation of the Lord because He is generous towards the entire humankind. We only see it as unfair or unjust because *our ways are not God's ways*, as the first reading pointed out. What the Lord sees in the late conversion of someone who had been far from Him is the response to a moment of Grace. We will call it KAIROS, as opposed to KRONOS. Kronos is simply a duration, a section of time, a small slice of time. We could measure Kronos by the tick-tak of the clock. That is why, the clock or the watch is called a chronometer. But KAIROS could not be measured by any clock. It can only be measured by LOVE, how the person responds to the invitation of the God of Love towards a deeper relationship with Him – far beyond the commerce of man.

A Moment of Grace is an occurrence in our lives that causes us to stop and think about the role we are called to play in the Kingdom of God. There is mercy, compassion and forgiveness for the past. What matters to the Lord is the present and future.

The sad problem is that many people give up on themselves. But the Lord never gives up on us. Sometimes, we have the view that "it is just too late". We think that something we have done in our past is so terrible that God could never return us to a full share of His love. If this type of thought has come to our mind, we are wrong. God judges not by human standards, but by the standards of the Love and Mercy and Compassion of His heart. God never gives up. We do not have the right to give up on ourselves. Precisely, we must "seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;" the Prophet Isaiah tells us in the first reading.

We are so focused on our small selves, that we forget the big picture. Just to illustrate my point: Get your cellphone and focus on your small screen. Now, try sending a text to your friend. Can you see your surroundings? If you are texting while driving, can you see other motorists? Why do you think it is illegal to text and drive?

Today's gospel talks about two things: (1) about the generosity of God, mercy and compassion; (2) and about our tendency to compare ourselves with others and to be envious of their blessings.

God is generous. Those laborers who worked at five o'clock in the afternoon received their share not as a payment for the work they had done but because of the generosity of the landowner. We will inherit eternal life not because we did not violate the Ten Commandments, we prayed regularly, we went to Mass everyday, we helped the poor and the needy. Eternal life is not a reward but a gift because God is so generous.

My dear people of God: The Master of the Vineyard did but one thing. He told his servant to '*call the laborers and give them their pay.*'" On Judgment Day, God will not ask how much we have done or what we knew. This the sole question would be whether we had worked in the vineyard. First we must be in the vineyard, then we must work in it. What matters is that you and I are at work in God's Church. I conclude then with His invitation: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call Him while He is near." Amen.