

Readings: Isaiah 55: 6-9; Phillipians 1: 20-24, 27: Matthew 20: 1-16



Fr Michael says:

The Workers in the Vineyard

Today's Gospel is unique to Matthew, and a wonderful message it is for us: the challenge to break free of legalism, duties and responsibilities and launch into a new and fresh vision of what the Lord has in store for us. It is not for nothing that the opening Reading from Isaiah: "as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's ways from ours – let us never forget this basic truth! We need to concentrate on what is essential for our lives – fullness of union with Him! The Gospel shows us who God is really is and how He wants to be seen.

Jesus' audience would be surprised by the events: why does the master hire and not the steward; the giving of "the wage" – a full day's pay for all and also the order in which the men were paid, from the last to the first, not the other way round as is usual. The main figure in the story is the Master and how he acts.

The situation at the heart of the parable is taken straight from reality: the waiting and searching for work, people have to wait to be employed because they have no other skills to offer. They have no value in themselves, only for what they can offer. They will settle for the minimum wage, but as the day advances, hope fades. Many will return home with nothing, truly the first come first as the last come last! The men in the parable are not idlers, they want to work! The thought of a farmer offering to pay a full day's wages for one hour's work, is unimaginable – but it is the heart of the story! People understood from where Jesus was coming – He was talking of the Kingdom of God, the ones who had been working all day were the Pharisees and Jews in general; the people who work for an hour are the Gentiles and sinners. So the Kingdom is being offered to ALL peoples – something the "virtuous" could not accept! They thought God worked on a merit system – the opposite is true! We feel that those who have risen up the line a bit in life would feel compassion for those who are trying to do the same – but no!

If we are into competition and rewards – the Gospel does not make much sense! From the point of view of strict justice – the parables are not just! However, would we want to be treated by God according to this criterion – we all need His mercy and generosity, which precisely makes the point for the story. Faced with God, we cannot put Him in our debt – it is not a question of rights, entitlements or anything else. Everything that comes to us is a gift, motivated by love of us – let us rejoice and give thanks in wonder and awe! May what we receive, may we share fully with others in our dealings with them. It is something which demands a conversion of mind and heart!

How true is that phrase in Isaiah with which I started this homily? How small our thoughts can be and how poor our ways of seeing and judging – we are so miserly in our words and deeds – because of our small minds and hearts. "Lord, open our minds and enlarge our hearts, so that we think and act more like you! Let us not begrudge your goodness to others, knowing that we too are undeserving of your favours, and stand more in need of your mercy than of your praise. Amen!"



Fr Tom says:

“Opening doors to the treasure beyond!”

I recently attended the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Augustinian Friars back to England (1864-2014) after Catholic Emancipation in 1850 and the laying of the first stone of their Church in Hoxton and the site of their first community. The church, named after St Monica, lies in Hoxton Square near Shoreditch in East London. The Church is set within a row of houses and blends in so well it is possible to miss it on first sight. On entering you are greeted with a wonderful experience. In redecorating the Church for their 150 year anniversary, they have discovered some beautiful art work hidden under the whitewash used to cover it up. There is still a long way to go to discover the full extent of this hidden beauty. Scaffolding still covers the sanctuary. But, as Cardinal Vincent Nichols said in his homily, it is a work in progress just like our journey of faith with the prospect of many more riches waiting to be uncovered.

This is a great introduction for our readings this weekend. St Paul reminds us that we have to make a choice. You have to choose to walk through the doors of the church to discover the beauty and wonder hidden within. It is the same with our readings this week and every week. We are invited to walk through the door into them and discover the treasures hidden within. Only with scripture there are many, many doors to choose from. Fortunately, there is treasure behind whichever door you choose to open (helpful when you came back to the same reading time and again).

The door I walked through revealed a treasure from Isaiah who reminded us that *“God’s ways are not man’s ways!”* Paul adds his reminder that we have to make a choice and Jesus, in his story of the vineyard owner, offers us an invitation to join him in work for his kingdom which for want of a better word he called his vineyard. On accepting to join Jesus it is obvious we are not in it for the money because it is a privilege and an honour to be invited to join in this work in the first place and, in working in the kingdom, we discover the richness and generosity of God, his deep, deep love for us whether we are born into it or we are the late, late comers. In accepting the invitation and getting our hands dirty so to speak, we discover the same qualities we find in God are also within ourselves and being made in the image of God begins to make more sense. So in following in God’s way we uncover the richness and beauty of our lives and, inspired by God’s generosity, we want to help others to make the same discovery. This is what our opening prayer calls ‘loving our neighbour’.

No wonder St Paul encourages us to live in God’s way for if we don’t we will miss all this and walk past the door and all the treasure that lie behind it will remain unknown, undiscovered. In the end, although we do not work for a ‘reward’ or ‘payment’, we receive a treasure far, far greater: a deeper relationship with Jesus and a deeper appreciation of ourselves as we come to understand that we are becoming increasingly better mirrors of God’s generosity and love for all those we encounter. This is something money could never buy. So, isn’t it a good thing that God’s ways are not man’s ways?

Happy door opening!!