



## 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

In the first reading (Is 55:6-9) the third Isaiah describes how God's ways and thoughts are above our ways and thoughts. Since this electronic format does not restrict the space I am able to use I will reprint these beautiful verses in full. "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."

### **Something to Think About:**

1. This chapter links the second and third part of the Book of Isaiah. Deutero-Isaiah had spent most of his preaching explaining to the exiles that they were in Babylon as a just punishment because of their sins but that God was merciful and would allow them to return to their homeland. The opportunity to return to their homeland will not last forever. The Lord is acting now so they must seek Him while He can be found. They need to seek God's grace while it is available to them. They need to repent and seek God's mercy because God is not a vengeful god but a God of love and mercy.

2. God's ways are not our ways. He does not seek vengeance for wrongdoing. Rather He is governed by righteousness and will therefore be merciful. His thoughts are not our thoughts. He does not seek revenge. He is so powerful that He can be merciful.

In the second reading (Phil 1:20c-24, 27a) Paul says that Christ will be magnified in his body whether he lives or dies. For him Christ is life and death is gain. If he lives in the flesh, it will mean fruitful labor for him. If he dies, he will be with Christ, which is far

better. He felt caught between wanting to live or die. He exhorts the Philippians to conduct themselves in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ.

### **Something to Think About:**

1. For the next four weeks the second reading at Sunday mass is going to be from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. He wrote it while he was in prison in Rome awaiting trial, so it was at the end of his life and ministry here on earth. Earlier he had visited the city of Philippi. He had begun by preaching to the Jews but then turned to the gentiles. He baptized a leading woman of the city named Lydia who sold purple goods. When he had driven out the devil from a woman who was possessed, he was thrown into prison because her owners were no longer able to use her to make money by selling her ability to prophesy. While in prison an earthquake unshackled him. Then he baptized the jailer. He eventually needs to leave town because of threats. Now in Rome some years later he writes to them about the need to be joyful in the face of prosecution.

2. From prison Paul looks forward to his death because he will be with the Lord. There are some Christians that believe that when we die, we will "sleep" until the last day when our bodies will be resurrected. Here Paul clearly believes that his soul will be with Christ when he dies. Later on after the final judgement his soul will rejoin his body at the resurrection of the body. This is the teaching of the Catholic faith (CCC 366, 990).

In the gospel (Mt 20:1-15a) Jesus tells His disciples a parable, saying that the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing to hire them for the usual daily wage he sent them to his vineyard. At nine o'clock, noon and three o'clock he went out again and sent men to work in his vineyard. At five o'clock he found others standing around idle and sent them

into his vineyard. When it was evening, he told his foreman to give the workers their pay beginning with the last group that was hired and give them the usual daily wage. The others thought that they would receive more but they too received the usual daily wage. They complained that the last group had only worked one hour and that they had borne the heat of the day. The owner said that he was not cheating them for they had agreed to work for the daily wage. He asked if they were envious because he was generous. Thus, the last will be first and the first will be last.

### **Something to Think About:**

1. In Jesus' parable it is natural to think allegorically of the landowner as God, the workers as ourselves, and the vineyard as the kingdom of God. God goes out early in the morning and invites people to come into His kingdom. Perhaps we might think of these as people who were baptized as infants. They work in the kingdom their entire lives. They agree and look forward to receiving the usual reward of their labors: i.e. eternal life. They agreed from the beginning that they would work in the vineyard for their entire earthly lives. But God was not content with only those whom He found first thing in the morning. He would go out again several times to find others and invite them into His kingdom. He would even invite those who only had an hour to live to come into His kingdom. All of the workers did what they were told; they worked in the vineyard. For that they were all given their reward of eternal life for God is most generous.

2. Before God went to the marketplace the men were standing idly by doing nothing. God's gracious call gives meaning to our lives. God finds us idle and offers us an opportunity to work in the kingdom. His call gives us purpose and direction.

3. I found the following example when reading a commentary about this gospel. Unfortunately the author's name was not mentioned but it went like this. A father allows his young son to push the lawn mower handle while he makes it move. The child could not make it move by himself. The father could finish the work much sooner if he did it by himself, but he had a greater purpose in mind that simply mowing the grass. He wanted to help his child grow and want to share in the work. The landowner in Jesus' parable also had more than just grapes to harvest. He wanted to practice generosity. He went looking for the harvesters. Grace cannot be rightly defined as God doing all the work for us. That would

simply be a display of His divine power. Rather, God's grace evokes wonder and growth in us as we recognize that He does it all with us. Our participation is never essential; but it is real. God does not need us to complete the work. Working in and through us slows Him down. The grace comes about by submitting to Christ's lordship over us and admitting that we cannot do it ourselves. Nor can we claim that the final results are due to our efforts alone. We have merely participated.

4. Instead of relying on the adage of first come, first serve God puts the last first and the first last. He isn't impressed by our apparent achievements. The workers in the parable did no more than what was asked of them. The landowner owed them no more than what they received. We should be grateful for that. Secondly, He rejects our comparisons in which we demand equal treatment when we have received less than what we think we deserve. We do not worry about others when we think we are ahead of them, but we do when we think they are ahead of us. Finally God's rewards come from His generosity; we do not deserve anything.

*Deacon Mike McKale*