

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 21, 2008

I did a little poll this week. I asked “What do you think of this Gospel?” Without exception everyone I asked said “It isn’t fair! It just isn’t right to pay one person who worked an hour a full day’s wages and not pay extra to the one who worked all day.” Someone told me “I’ve heard this Gospel 100 times and I still don’t like it. I won’t mention any names but another said “I’ve heard sermons on how this Gospel is all about God’s love and justice.... and how that isn’t human justice ... and that God can be as generous as he wants, and blah, blah blah, it still doesn’t seem fair. And I still don’t like it and nothing you say is going to change that.”

Well, with that in mind, let me tell you a story.

St. Anne Parish is one of those in-between parishes. It was built in mid-town just a few years before everyone moved out into the suburbs. About 1962 they took down the old church and built a new one for 600 people but the most anyone can remember being in church at one time is around 250. This morning about 150 people will come to hear the Matthew’s Gospel about the workers in the vineyard.

Mrs. Walsh toddles in with her walker. She was baptized in the old church and proudly tells everyone been a practicing Catholic for 94 years. There isn’t a day that goes by that she doesn’t say her rosary, attend Mass and pray for the poor souls in purgatory. She came at the first hour.

Mary is a cradle Catholic – she sits in the 3rd bench back on the left. She and her husband have been married 30 years and Bob has decided to join the Church. He is in RCIA right now. It looks like there is a new worker coming in today.

Sam, good old Sam goes up to communion every Sunday and takes 5 extra hosts for the nursing home parishioners. There are five older ladies there from St. Anne's who he visits each week. I guess Sam is there at the first hour and the ladies are there by extension.

Benita is a real Catholic. She wears one of those long chapel veils and genuflects at least 5 or 6 times during the Mass. She sits in the very last bench and leaves right after communion ... so she really shouldn't get full credit for the day's work.

Dorothy comes every Sunday with her neighbor, Jean. Her kids went off to college and they haven't been seen in church for years. We see them at the grocery and around town but the two of them come every week without fail.

Jim and Brenda have kids in the school. They come in sun-burnt and happy with their bunch of children. He must rob banks for a living because all 9 of his kids look like they have just got a new hair cut, their clothes are perfect and he drives a brand new Buick.

Right in the middle of the sermon, the back door flies open and Gabriella crashes with her children. She has 8 of them. The babies are crying and the little kids are enthralled by the big aisles and the beautiful stain glass windows. But her teenager is bored to tears and could care less about being here. Angela, who is 17 years old, announced last week that she doesn't believe in God, You see it is cool in her school to be an atheist. She and kids came at the 3rd hour but Angela is only about half there.

Fr. John, the pastor tells everyone at the beginning of Mass that if you think this reading is hard, you should have read the whole passage in Matthew. Jesus had just told the rich young man that he needed to sell all he had and give it to the poor and then come and follow him if he wanted to gain eternal life. Fr. John knows that the parishioners of St. Anne's can't imagine giving up everything to follow Jesus. He also knows that each one of them in their own way is living life the best he or she can. He knows that next Sunday they will come together again to pray and keep on trying to follow Jesus.

Like the people in this story.... We come to the vineyard at all hours of the day and sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker. We come with our own life experiences and our own way of believing. Oh, excuse me, did I say vineyard?

Like the people in this story, we all wonder why some of those in the vineyard, seem to have more than others. Excuse me, did I say vineyard?

Like the people in this story, some of the people in the vineyard haven't done their fair share, they haven't served on committees or done coffee and donuts for years... so they don't really know how the parish should be run. Oops did I say vineyard again,

Like Fr. John, I am not sure anyone of us sitting here is ready to give away all and follow Jesus. But like the people of St. Anne's we come to celebrate Eucharist together. We just come to the vineyard when we can, serve others to the best of our ability and trust that God will provide for us today. Oops – I said vineyard again... Vineyard...church... I'm sorry I can't seem to tell the difference.