

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 21, 2014

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

EMPLOYMENT LAW!

We are a nation of laws. We have laws that govern commerce, contracts, financial transactions, wills and inheritance, marriage and divorce, education and child rearing, immigration, elections, professional behavior, etc. There are laws for every aspect of life.

One particular area of law might come to mind in light of this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 20:1-16), namely, those laws that deal with labor and employment. Such laws are concerned with wages, working hours, hiring, firing, sick leave, grievances, harassment, etc.

This Sunday Jesus tells a parable about the owner of a vineyard who hires workers at five different times throughout the day. When evening comes, the owner instructs his foreman to pay each person the same amount regardless of how long each worked. This obviously upsets those who labored the entire day, and rightly so.

Imagine if an employer hired us at 6 am to work for 12 hours at \$10 an hour. Then that employer went out later and hired other people during the course of the day.

At 6 pm, at quitting time, we were paid \$120 as was agreed, but so were all the other laborers. That would mean those hired at 9 am were paid \$13.33 per hour; those hired at 12 noon were paid \$20 an hour; those hired at 3 pm were paid \$40 an hour; and those hired at 5 pm, were paid a whopping \$120 per hour!

We certainly would be justified in thinking some labor law had been violated. How could an employer pay people hired the same day, to do the same work, at such vastly different hourly rates? Was that employer favoring certain workers on the basis of race, gender, color, national origin, religion, or sexual orientation? Equal work demands equal pay.

Yet Jesus tells us that God operates like the employer in the parable. God calls people at different times to have a relationship with him and to have a place in his kingdom. Some people respond to God's invitation from childhood, while others come to God years later, and some not until the curtain is about to fall on their life.

Yet no matter when they respond, all are welcomed and loved as if they had been with God from the very beginning. For God operates according to his boundless mercy and not according to fair labor practices. As the owner of the vineyard told those who could not understand his behavior, "Are you envious because I am generous?"

If we need a concrete example of this generous mercy, just consider how Jesus responded that first Good Friday when the thief on the cross asked him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." "Today," Jesus answered, "you will be with me in Paradise."

Such divine mercy is difficult to comprehend for we tend to understand the kingdom of heaven as something earned by our good works rather than as a gift that God gives his children. If we

do accept the possibility that those we consider undeserving do gain a place in the kingdom, we content ourselves by thinking our place, our “mansion in the sky,” will be bigger and better than theirs!

Yet Sunday’s parable seems to negate that idea as well since at the end of the day, each person hired is given the same daily wage.

While society has its labor and employment laws that govern when we work and how we are paid, God operates in an entirely different way. As God says in Sunday’s First Reading, “As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:9)

God’s way of doing things is not governed by our laws.

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