

My Brothers and Sisters,

Last Sunday's Gospel focused on God's mercy and forgiveness. Today's Gospel offers another example of God's mercy. However, in this parable, God demonstrates his mercy not in forgiveness but in extreme generosity. Our God is a generous God. If God is generous, we are called to be generous. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus said, "*Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap*" [6:38]. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully...for God loves a cheerful giver*" [2 Cor. 9:6-7].

However, this parable not only gives us insight into God's mercy and generosity but also into his justice. As Pope Francis wrote in his proclamation of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, "God's justice is his mercy" [*Misericordiae Vultus*, 20].

In this parable, the landowner, who represents God, went out to hire workers at dawn, 9:00 a.m., noon, 3:00 p.m., and 5:00 p.m.. Some workers, therefore, worked 12 hours, others 9 hours, others 6 hours, still others 3 hours, and some just 1 hour. When it came time to pay them, the landowner told his servant to pay them all for a full day's work starting with those who were hired last. Those who worked 12 hours expected to be paid more, but they were paid the usual daily wage, and they were not happy and complained. The owner responded that they were paid the amount to which they had agreed and asked them if they were envious because he was generous.

If we are honest with ourselves, almost of us would sympathize with the workers who worked all day. If we worked all day and someone who worked only one hour was paid the same amount as we were, we would be very angry. We would complain and argue that we were treated unfairly, even unjustly. Likewise, if we were in the position of the landowner, most of us would not pay workers who only worked one hour a full-day's pay. We just would not do it. We would not think it was fair to ourselves or to our company. However, because God's justice is his mercy, God would not have been just if he had not been generous.

At the end of the Gospel, Jesus said, "*Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last.*" I would suggest this parable also challenges how we compare ourselves to others. In my experience, sometimes Christians and Catholics are resentful of other Christians who become actively Christian late in life or return to active Christianity late in life. They feel that they who have attended Church regularly through the years, who have lived good and holy lives, who have given generously of their time, talent, and treasure to the Church should be first. God loves those who come late to the table as much as he loves us. God will be as merciful to them as he will be to us. God will be as generous to them as he will be to us. This is indeed a difficult saying.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel exemplifies God's words in today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.*" However, the next verse is just as significant: "*As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.*" God is telling us that he is above all human limitations and pettiness, including our limited human understandings of justice, mercy, generosity, and privilege.