

**Homily for the Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
September 24, 2017**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The classical Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote that there is an art to being generous. If people have the resources to be generous, they can do so without showing off, or making those who receive their generosity feel belittled. People who are truly generous are those who do not value money in itself, but only in as much as they can spend it usefully on others.

There are also two contrasting sorts of character. One is the wasteful person who spends money foolishly, like the prodigal son in the parable. The other is the miser, who hoards money, and even steals the goods of others. There is also an art to receiving. We can receive presents, or help, or a compliment, graciously. Or we can be ungrateful, sullen and resentful. Even worse, we can resent the good things that come to others, and be eaten up with envy. The same ancient philosopher, Aristotle, defined envy as “a kind of distress at apparent success on the part of one’s equals.” It is,

then, feeling put out, or even bitter, at the good that happens to other people, especially people close to us, or of the same group. The ancient world had a special term for this: it was called the “evil eye.”

In the Greek of today’s Gospel reading, at the end of the story the landowner asks the grumbling worker, “have you got the evil eye because I am generous?” Our modern translation renders this as, “Are you envious because I am generous?” In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus lists the “evil eye” of envy as one of the things that come out of people to make them unclean. There was much superstition attached to this phrase, but in the New Testament it is a vivid image for intense envy and resentment. This was thought to show itself in people’s looks, just as we might say “green with envy.”

So in the Gospel reading we have the contrast of the generosity of the landowner and the envious reaction of the laborers. We might see the landowner as representing God, and the workers as the people of the Old Testament. The Jewish people had labored under the law of Moses for many centuries, and now that Jesus was also bringing in the Gentiles to be saved, some of them felt a certain resentment. Certainly Paul’s letters show us that there were disputes between Jewish Christians and those who were

converted from paganism. Such tensions would be natural in the formation of a new society. Perhaps the parable is a warning against being blinded by tensions such as this.

But the parable has a wider application than the early Church. We may at times react against the injustice that we see in the world, and often we are right to do so. There is a proper sense of indignation when we see a real injustice done. However, as far as our relations with God go, we have no cause for envy. Like the landowner in the parable, God bestows gifts to people according to the divine will, and everyone has been given some gift. The basic gift is, of course, life. Without that, we would have nothing either to complain about or to rejoice in. As Saint Paul asks the Corinthians in this regard, "What do you possess that you have not received?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Envy of other people's money, good looks, fame, or even spiritual gifts, does nothing except to corrode the character of the person doing the envying. Thinking about the gifts we have been given ourselves, and being grateful for them, is more positive and more gracious. We can also rejoice in the gifts that God gives to others. As members of the Church, we are all part of the same body, and can therefore share in each other's gifts. So

rather than begrudging God's generosity or moaning about what we don't have, we can bear in mind the words of Blessed John Henry Newman: "God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do his work."

In today's Gospel passage we hear Jesus teaching through a parable that captures this very message. Our Lord speaks about the kingdom of Heaven and compares the Father to a landowner who has a vineyard in which he needs laborers. The landowner goes out in the morning and offers work to those in need, he does the same in the middle of the day and toward the end of the day, offering a day's pay to each person who works for Him. This is not meant as a treatise on labor relations, rather our Lord wants us to understand that His grace is a free gift that He gives to each and every one of His disciples. Therefore, those called to live as Christ's disciples from a young age do not enjoy a place of privilege over someone called to discipleship later in life. Rather, we are given the amount of grace that each of us needs to follow our Lord and live as His disciples in the midst of the world today.

So, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the question that we must ask ourselves based on our Lord's message is: what we do with the grace that we are given? Do we use that grace to build up the kingdom of God on earth so that we may attain eternal life in heaven forever? Or do we seek things of this world and ignore the grace that our Lord gives us? It is my hope that we can all answer that we use the grace that we are given for the work we do in the vineyard of the Lord. If, however, we cannot say that, let us commit ourselves ever more fervently to prayer and asking our Lord to strengthen our resolve to live as His disciples.

Recognizing that God will never refuse His grace to anyone who comes to Him with true repentance, we gather now around the table of the Lord as one family united by God's love and generosity.

May God give us this grace. Amen.