

HOMILY SUNDAY 25 – A (Homily 02)

“Disneyland and the Reign of God”

(Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 145; Philippians 1:20-24, 27; Matthew 20:1-16)

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Do you have an attitude problem? Do you need to check your attitude?

Today, we are invited to live life in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That Gospel invites us to check our attitudes and to change them if necessary so that we can be open to God’s amazing, unearned grace and live in the reign of God.

An attitude is our usual way of being in this world. It includes our thoughts and feelings, but is much deeper than those, and affects us profoundly – how we think, feel and act. Most often, our negative attitudes are our biggest obstacles to enjoying the Kingdom of God and positive, healthy, enjoyable relationships.

Some attitudes or character defects such as doubt, false pride, stubbornness, control, domination, self-righteousness and especially human insecurity are like negative, sinful roots within us that give rise to all kinds of painful emotions such as jealousy, envy, fear, anger, resentment, lust. These emotions in turn affect how we behave – leading us to act out to the point of addiction (especially gossip and the abuse of alcohol, drugs, sex and gambling, to name a few).

The workers who came early in today’s gospel had an attitude problem. They were blind to the Kingdom of God that was being given to them (the opportunity to be hired personally by the landowner himself, to enter into relationship with and be with the owner all day, to find fulfillment and satisfaction in work well done).

They could only see seeming injustice when those who came late were paid the same as them, of fairness on their own terms, and were not open to amazing grace, so they grumbled and were upset. Their negative attitude closed them off from rejoicing in the mystery of unearned grace from God.

Albert had grown up in a dysfunctional family. His father was a workaholic and his mother the adult child of an alcoholic. Although his home life was stable, there was no display of affection between his mother and father, nor healthy sharing of emotions as a family. This lack of love he experienced growing up created a hole in his soul, a yearning for love and intimacy. He eventually went to the seminary,

thinking he had a vocation to the priesthood. Needing a father figure in his life, he longed to be close to the superior, as was another seminarian. He was actually jealous of this other seminarian, though he would never admit that. Finally one day he got into a physical struggle with this seminarian who criticized the way Albert had arranged pictures in the lounge, an incident that surprised them both. Albert's insecure attitude and feelings of envy led him to act out in a harmful physical way, even in the seminary.

Today, we are invited to live life in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That Gospel invites us to check our attitudes and to change them if necessary so that we can be open to God's amazing, unearned grace and live in the reign of God.

An incident involving a ball game gave Fr. Tom, a young priest in his first northern mission, an insight into the meaning of this gospel passage. He had been asked to play as part of a team for an evening ball game on the school diamond near the church. Just as the game was getting underway, a car pulled up to the rectory so he left the game, suggesting that they replace him as he did not know how long this would take. He spent the next hour helping a young married couple struggling in their relationship. Once in a while he would glance out the window at the ball game, feeling a little sorry for himself that he was missing all the fun. As soon as the couple left, he rushed out to see how his team was doing only to have them put him right back into the game. They had not replaced him. Rather, they played shorthanded for five innings and now were just glad that he was back and they were a full team once again. He was touched that they had waited and only too glad to play the last couple innings.

He realized that he had been graced with a lived experience of today's gospel of the workers in the vineyard. Now he saw that the Kingdom of God is like a ball game. Happy are those who come early and get to play the whole game. Those who come late, like he did, miss out on so much, yet better late than never. And everyone rejoices when someone does come into the kingdom, at whatever hour. This gospel that is hard to understand now made more sense to him.

Here is a more modern parable. A group of Canadians on vacation decide to check out Disneyland. They know that passes are \$75 a day or \$50 for half a day. Some decide to go early for the full day. A few others, more attached to their money, decide to go half a day to save a few dollars. Each group arrives to find that a promotion is on and the passes are only \$25 for the whole day. The first group had great fun all morning and felt sorry for the others who were coming later. They did

not begrudge them coming late, but rather welcomed them when they came, and actually kept some of the best activities for the last so they could enjoy them all together. Our God of amazing generosity, and the Kingdom of Heaven, is a bit like that experience of Disneyland.

Are we like the first workers in the vineyard, able to see only seeming injustice instead of amazing unearned grace at the good fortune of others, or are we like the first group of tourists in Disneyland, able to rejoice that all are welcome into the fun? Do we realize that no one is worthy of the reign of God; that all are given unmerited mercy, forgiveness and love by God? That the most important attitude of all is simply being open to God's generous, amazing, unmerited grace?

St. Paul, in the second reading to the Philippians, challenges us to look within, to check our attitudes, to change our ways and our thoughts if necessary, and to come back to God with all our hearts.

The Eucharist that we celebrate together now is a humble meal that challenges our attitudes of doubt, of control, of insecurity. Our God, so humble, secure and loving that he can come to us as bread and wine, words out of a book and through each other, can and wants to transform us into his people, the Body of his Son Jesus Christ. All we need is an open attitude.

In the end, we are to live life in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That Gospel today invites us to check our attitudes and to change them if necessary so that we can be open to God's amazing, unearned grace and live in the reign of God.