Wednesday of the Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 20:1-16): Jesus told his disciples this parable: “The Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.’ So they went off. And he went out again around noon, and around three o’clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o’clock, he found others standing around, and said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard.’

When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.’ When those who had started about five o’clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day’s burden and the heat.’ He said to one of them in reply, ‘My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?’ Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

“The last will be first, and the first will be last.”

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Today, the Word of God invites us to see that divine “logic” goes far beyond merely human logic. While we humans calculate (“They thought they would receive more”: Mt 20:10), God—who is a loving Father—simply loves (“Are you envious because I am generous?”: Mt 20:15). And the measure of Love is immeasurable: “I love because I love, I love that I may love” (Saint Bernard).

But this does not render justice useless: “I will give you what is just” (Mt 20:4). God is not arbitrary and wants to treat us as intelligent children: this is why it is logical that He makes “deals” with us. In fact, at other times, Jesus' teachings make it clear that to whom much has been given, much will also be required (remember the parable of the talents). In short, God is just, but charity does not disregard justice; rather, it surpasses it (cf. 1 Cor 13:5).

A popular saying states that "justice for justice's sake is the worst kind of injustice." Fortunately for us, God's justice—let us repeat, overflowing with His Love—surpasses our understanding. If it were a matter of pure and strict justice, we would still be awaiting redemption. Moreover, we would have no hope of redemption. In strict justice, we would not deserve any redemption: we would simply be deprived of that which was given to us at the moment of creation and which we rejected at the moment of original sin. Let us, therefore, examine how we conduct ourselves with judgments, comparisons, and calculations when dealing with others.

Furthermore, if we speak of holiness, we must start from the premise that everything is grace. The clearest example is the case of Dismas, the good thief. Even the possibility of meriting God's favor is also a grace (something freely given to us). God is the master, our “landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard” (Mt 20:1). The vineyard (that is, life, heaven…) is His; we are invited, and not just in any way: it is an honor to be able to work there and to be able to “earn” heaven.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “The Lord called them all when they were ready to obey, which he did with the good thief, whom the Lord called when he saw that he would obey. The Savior did not exclude anyone» (Saint John Chrysostom)

- “This parable was not transmitted for workers of another time, but for us, who take for granted that "spiritual unemployment" —a life without faith and prayer— is more pleasant than spiritual service” (Benedict XVI)

- “Man is himself the author, center, and goal of all economic and social life. the decisive point of the social question is that goods created by God for everyone should in fact reach everyone in accordance with justice and with the help of charity.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2,459)