

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year A

Isaiah 55:6-9

Psalms 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

Matthew 20:1-16a

Gathering

(An unlit candle, a bible and an open laptop with a Google browser on screen, if possible, are arranged on a table covered with the financial pages of the local newspaper.)

We reflect this week on the contrast between God's Way of mercy and justice and our thoughts and ways. *(If new members are joining the community, some time is taken for people to become acquainted and for newcomers to learn something about the history of the community. All share their hopes and expectations about being a part of a small church community.)*

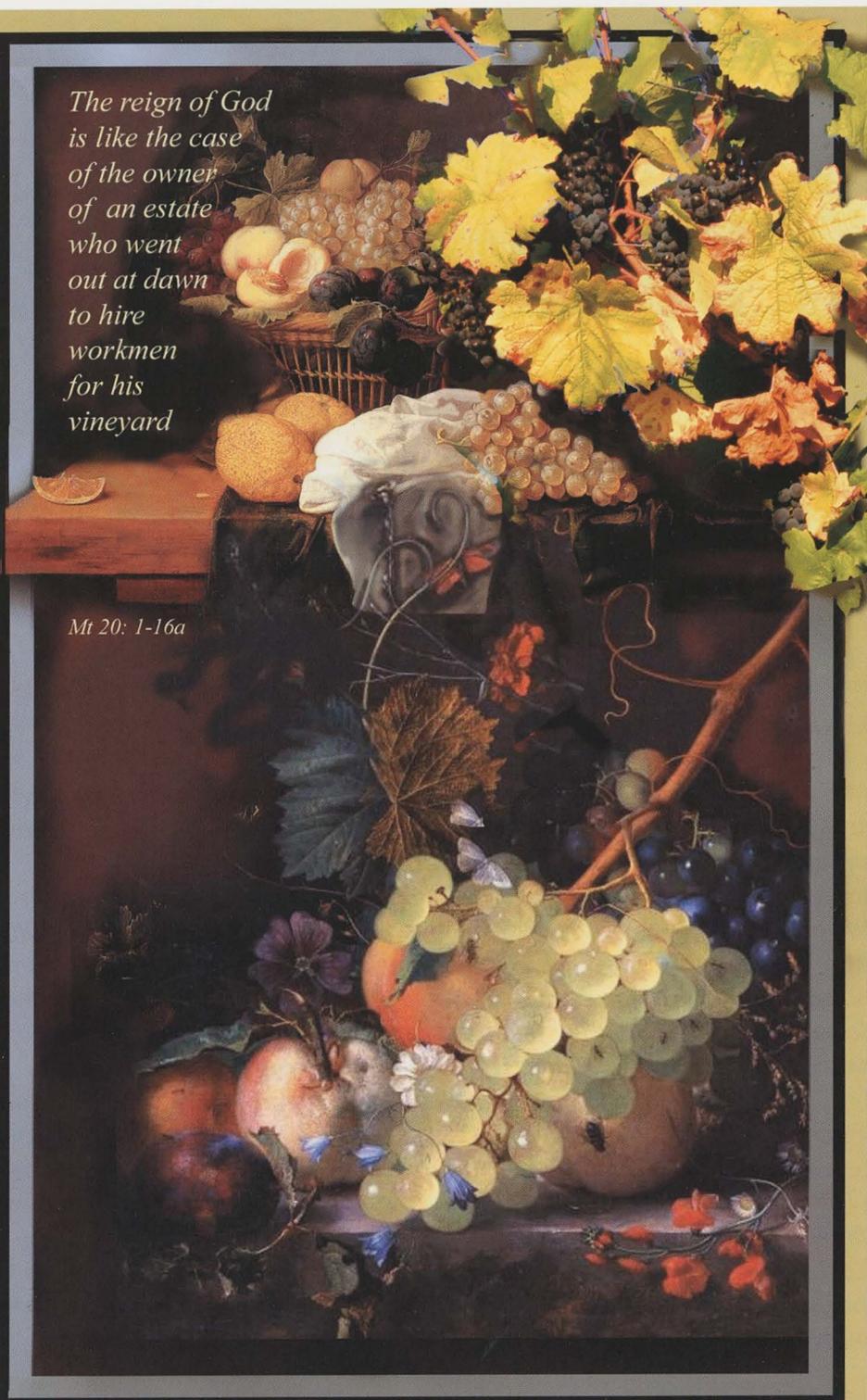
Prayer

(The candle is lit. The leader invites members to be attentive to God's presence. After a time of quiet, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: Almighty Father, the love you offer always exceeds the furthest expression of our human longing, for you are greater than the human heart. Direct each thought, each effort of our life, so that the limits of our faults and

*The reign of God
is like the case
of the owner
of an estate
who went
out at dawn
to hire
workmen
for his
vineyard*

Mt 20: 1-16a



weaknesses may not obscure the vision of your glory or keep us from the peace you have promised. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

New Saint Joseph Sunday Missal,
Catholic Book Publishing Co., NJ, 1999, pg. 195

(Members join in singing "For the Fruits of His Creation." The song may be available on the Internet.)

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. The leader then poses these questions: "What draws you to this gospel?" "Where do you resist this gospel?" The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to rearrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

We live in an age of immediacy. Turn on the computer, connect with the world. Have a question? Get an answer. *Search* and you shall find. *Click* and the window shall be opened to you. Certainly, the benefits of technology are many, but when it comes to discerning God's Way of infinite mercy and abundant love, there are often no easy answers.

Listening to Isaiah, we might imagine how a worn-down, disillusioned people might want to opt for easy answers and quick fixes, apart from God. Instead of rebuke, Isaiah urgently calls the people to repentance and renewed

relationship with God, “who is generous in forgiving.” God instructs us through his prophet that right relationship depends upon our acceptance of, and trust in, God’s ways above our ways, and in God’s thoughts above our thoughts.

Today, a culture of corporate greed and financial irresponsibility has left millions of unassuming, hard-working individuals without jobs and means of support. Many are very uncertain and anxious about their future. Surely, the hardworking should be able to enjoy the benefits of their fruitful labor! But the contemporary economic scene is very far from God’s Way of fairness and justice.

The gospel tells us that “the last will be first, and the first will be last.” This is a powerful and unconventional poke at our often self-focused interpretations of divine mercy and justice. The paradox is that God’s Way of mercy, dignity and love includes *all* people – regardless of status or striving. God’s *generous justice* will prevail.

A quick Google search for “God’s Way” will yield over 7,000,000 results, but no easy answers. Our true search engine isn’t on the desktop, but in the depth of our hearts. Let us open our hearts and renew our trust in God’s Way over our own. God is not only “generous in forgiving,” God is generous with all God’s gifts.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ What is your personal experience of injustice?
- ◆ How do you experience God’s mercy in the day to day?
- ◆ What attitudes do you need to forsake in order to relate more closely to God?
- ◆ When have you felt angry with God over injustice or unfairness?
- ◆ How have your ways and your thoughts grown closer to God’s thoughts and ways over the years?

HEARING THE GOSPEL’S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you hear Christ saying to

us in hearing and sharing his word?” “What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Consider your thoughts and your ways. Listen for the prompting of the Spirit drawing you closer to God’s ways and God’s thoughts.
- ◆ Observe how you think about and respond to people/issues this week. Sometimes it is a matter of either/or. Many times it is a matter of both/and. Think big this week.
- ◆ Visit the Marianist Social Justice web site (www.msjc.net) and under “Issue Teams,” click on “Alternatives to Violence” to find an opportunity to promote the reign of God.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel of the week is re-proclaimed by a member of the community. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five, perhaps even seven, minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two or a brief thought that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. When this sharing is complete, members take turns praying one line of the prayer that follows.)

Members: Gracious and Holy Father, please give us:
Intellect to understand you,
Reason to discern you,
Diligence to seek you,
Wisdom to find you,
A spirit to know you,
A heart to meditate upon you,
Ears to hear you,
Eyes to see you,

A tongue to proclaim you,
A way of life pleasing to you,
Patience to wait for you
Perseverance to look for you.

All: Grant us a perfect end, your holy presence, a blessed resurrection and life everlasting.

An adapted prayer from St. Benedict of Nursia,

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)

