

25th Sunday OT

Matthew 20:1-16

"The Last will be first and the first will be last!"

Where do you stand on today's gospel? If you are a cradle Catholic, you might be a little upset with how Jesus runs his business, especially paying the same wage for those who came at the last hours of the day. I knew a young lady in a Young Adults group many years ago that was very upset with this gospel. She just didn't see it as fair to allow these 'Jonny-Come-Lately' to get the same status as she, since she had been faithful to her religion all these years.

Maybe that was the problem, she was faithful ***to her Religion*** and not ***to the person of Jesus Christ***. If we enter into a personal relationship with the Lord, we are not going to worry about his past friends nor his future. We are not going to be jealous of John the Beloved and Mary Magdalen, nor of recent converts to Catholicism.

Paul's problem was that he was a full-blown Pharisee committed to serving his God, Adonai. Paul's conversion wasn't from a sinful life to a life of virtue. Even Paul bragged about his virtuous life, when he writes, "...in observance of the law (I was a) Pharisee, in zeal I persecuted the church, in righteousness based on the law ***I was blameless***." Most of us get confused about the status of converts, assuming they are all like the composer of the words to the hymn, ***Amazing Grace***, John Newton, a former slave trader who converted.

But even Paul had to go through a learning curve, only this ***time in his relationship to Jesus Christ*** and NOT to a set of laws. Paul even confronts Peter in his letter to the Galatians, when Jews came from Jerusalem to visit, Peter steps back into the law, especially the Kosher Law of not eating with Gentiles, "...We know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law."

And then Paul comes to this amazing realization, ***"I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me!"*** The other evangelist will follow Paul's belief and put it in a more forceful phrase, ***"Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me!"*** This relationship that the Resurrected Jesus now makes with us, his baptized brothers and sisters, is also stated in the powerful passage that John the Evangelist

writes in Chapter 14, where he writes, “The Father and I will come and **make our dwelling within you,**” (literally, pitch our tents).

As a Pharisee, Paul knew his Hebrew Scriptures, that the law does not save, where he writes in Galatians, “...Through the law I died to the law, that I might live for God...for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.” Paul eventually realized that our relationship with God is **through love**. At Wednesday’s reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he writes the most beautiful passage in all of the New Testament letters, “Brothers and sister: strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way...Love...So faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but **the greatest of these is love.**”

Paul is writing to the Philippians from prison in Ephesus, facing possible death, where he comes to the realization that his relationship of love for Christ Jesus is at its greatest. Our interest in this passage is that it lets us into his mind. If he dies, this would allow him an even greater intimacy with Christ than he already has! When a man is about to die he reflects on matters of his **heart**.

Paul writes further on in his letter, “I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them **so much rubbish**, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ...It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus.”

Peter’s relationship was one of bravado that never delivered, “I will die for you,” he boasted at the last supper. We know Jesus response to that. Paul at least admitted in the fact of his own death that he would be closer to the Lord after his death. John the Beloved stood at the foot of his cross. After the resurrection he would race to the tomb and peak inside, but was respectful enough to enter until Peter got there. But John believed.