

25th Sunday OT – Matthew 20:1-16; Philippians 1:20-24, 27

Usually, I begin with the gospel reading, and I will return to it. But the selection from Paul's letter to the Philippians is too interesting to pass. "For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose...I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit."

Paul is in prison, perhaps in Rome, more likely at Ephesus. The interest of our passage is that it lets us into the mind of Paul on the ***subject of his own death***. When he was converted, he probably thought that Christ would return before this took place. In fact, most Christians believed in an immanent Second Coming of Christ.

But the possibility of execution has concentrated Paul's thoughts. He wants to die because this would allow him an even greater intimacy with Christ than he had already. Remember, Paul did meet Christ along the road to Damascus. But his special calling was to preach the gospel. So, for the sake of his converts and his mission, he was ready to live on. So, Lord, for the sake of my parishioners I am ready to live on.

Today's gospel Jesus asks the question, "What is the kingdom of heaven like? Or what is God like? What happens when God reigns?" Professor Francine Cardman asks. "The disciple can imagine a kingdom, but only one along the lines of empire and exclusion, power and prestige. Today's gospel calls us instead to look and listen beyond the pattern of this world's limitations of heart and imagination. It calls us, not to leave the world and be free of its cares and needs, but to live here and now in the image of God's reign."

Jesus responds to the question, "God's reign is just and generous—embracing all who call upon God in the truth of their lives, in their deepest needs and hidden hopes. Yet, as Isaiah reminds us, God's ways and thoughts are so far above our own that we falter before God's gratuitous love."

The challenge for us is how we live out God's reign in our own lives, imagining what that Kingdom of God would be like if we respond in love, and not imagining what it is like because of others. The workers who had been hired first were aggrieved, having expected to receive more in return for their long labor, resentful that the owner had treated them and the last group of workers alike, "making them equal to us." "Like them," Professor Francine writes, "we

are captive to metrics and a stingy notion of merit...God's hands are not tied to our narrow calculus of justice, God's mercy is not bounded by the limitations of our compassion."

The challenge is not for songwriters, but our church leaders. "All *are* welcomed and cared for, all *live* equally from the generosity of God. And all *deserve* to share in God's goodness now, in the world that is the work of God's hands, in the community of life that encompasses and supports us all.

When we start arguing *who is in* and *who is out* because we have failed to keep the rubrics exactly, then maybe we are in the wrong kingdom. They're not breaking down the doors to get in. But they are lining up at the food pantries, the soup kitchens, the free shower, and clean clothes program.

What is the kingdom of heaven like? What is God like? And what are we like? What happens when we live in the image of God's reign? Maybe we should stop trying to figure it all out and just live it from the bottom of our hearts in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

I am reading the writings of Joan Chittister, a Benedictine Nun, that are collected in the series called *Modern Spiritual Masters Series*. It pulls together an annotated and beautifully edited collection from her more popular articles and books. At one particular part in the collection, I came across her belief of what the Kingdom of God would look like, beginning here on earth. And I quote:

"Through it all, for centuries—centuries—Benedictine communities—small, local, and autonomous—worked in creative ways to meet the needs of the areas in which they grew, struggling always to shape and balance a deep and communal spiritual life with the great social needs around them.

If the twenty-first century needs anything at all, it may well be a return to the life-giving, radical vision of Benedict. Perhaps we need a new reverence for bold Benedictine wisdom if civilization is to be saved again—and this time the very planet preserved." End quote.

Our founder Father Chaminade based our Rule of Life on the Rule of Benedict, one of the oldest, next to Saint Augustine, that has been used by religious orders throughout the centuries. Sister Joan mentions six pillars of the Rule of Benedict: Creative Work, Holy Leisure, Stewardship, Community, Humility, and Peace. At least three jump our immediately; Community, Peace, and Humility as compared to a discipleship of equals.

I am hoping in the future to find a speaker to go deeper in these pillars or characteristics of our Marianist Parish, especially with the help of Joan Chittister, since in all essence, we are that community here at Saint Francis de Sales, living the Benedictine Spirit, especially in the works we do here and over the Rhine. For now, in the light of today's gospel let us continue to live out that charism of Benedict through our founder Chaminade in our Eucharistic celebration today.