

God's Generosity Is Without Limit

Is. 55: 6-9; Phil. 1: 20-24, 27; Matt. 20: 1-16

In 1906, an American journalist, named Upton Sinclair, produced a novel called *The Jungle*. It was a fictionalized account, based on facts, of the horrific life of the working man in the meat packing plants in Chicago at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Jurgis Rudkus was a Lithuanian peasant who emigrated to America wanting to live the American dream of working hard and providing food, clothing, and housing for his family and education for his children. Being young and strong, Jurgis had no trouble finding a job in a Chicago meat packing plant and, starting with nothing, he began to build a life.

His friends and neighbours told him that, even though he had a job, if he got injured or sick, which were occupational hazards in the packinghouses, he would be thrown out of work in favour of another young, strong fellow. He believed none of this since he was a vigorous and confident person. But inevitably, he became injured and then infected.

As his productivity dwindled, he was cast aside and was forced to stand at the gates of the packinghouse every morning along with hundreds of other men hoping that a foreman would select him for work that day. The situation became more desperate as winter approached and he needed money not only for food and housing but also for heat.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples a parable about labourers similar to Jurgis who desperately waited for the owner of the vineyard to hire them for the day. Unlike the packinghouse foremen who only came out early in the morning to hire the day labourers, the master in Jesus' parable hired men early in the morning and then at 9:00 am and again at noon and later at 3:00 pm and 5:00 pm. Imagine the increasing desperation that the men felt on being passed over throughout the day and fearing that they and their families would have nothing to eat.

And even if they were hired, some who were hired late in the day probably feared that they would not be paid enough to provide for their families. Imagine their relief and gratitude when, at the end of the day, they were called forward first and received the full daily wage. In fact, everyone was paid the same amount regardless of when they were hired and how long they had worked that day.

Of course, that led to a lot of grumbling and complaining especially from those who had been hired first. Most of us would agree with them. They had worked more hours so they deserved more pay. But the master said that he was rich and he should be able to do whatever he wanted with his money. He chose to pay every worker the same.

The wealthy landowner represents God the Father. In the First Reading, Isaiah gives us an insight into the mind of God when he says: 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.' We have been taught that those who work the longest and the hardest should be rewarded first and with the most.

But God doesn't think the same way. He is generous. He offers His gift of everlasting life in heaven to everyone equally. He doesn't require us to work long and hard to receive our reward. We simply need to have faith in Jesus. We receive the same 'payment' regardless of when we are called or when we respond to God's call. The most startling example of this is the good thief on the cross who came to Jesus shortly before he died and received the same reward as someone who had been faithful to Jesus his entire life. We are all like day labourers hoping in the mercy and compassion of God. Let us place our lives into God's providential care and continue to hope and trust in His generosity.

