

TWENTY-FIFTH
SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A



FIRST READING

Isaiah 55:6–9

PSALM

Psalms 145:2–3, 8–9, 17–18

SECOND READING

Philippians 1:20–24, 27

GOSPEL

Matthew 20:1–16

Prayer

Psalms 145:2–3, 8–9, 17–18

Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name
forever and ever.

Great is the LORD, and
greatly to be praised; his
greatness is unsearchable.

The LORD is gracious and
merciful, slow to anger
and abounding in
steadfast love.

The LORD is good to all,
and his compassion is over
all that he has made.

The LORD is just in all his
ways, and kind in all his
doings.

The LORD is near to all
who call on him, to all
who call on him in truth.

Reading the Word

Isaiah 55:6–9

Seek the LORD while he
may be found, call upon
him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake
their way, and the
unrighteous their
thoughts; let them return
to the LORD, that he may
have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he
will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not
your thoughts, nor are
your ways my ways, says
the LORD.

For as the heavens are
higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher
than your ways and my
thoughts than your
thoughts.

Philippians 1:20–24, 27

It is my eager expectation
and hope that I will not be
put to shame in any way,
but that by my speaking
with all boldness, Christ will
be exalted now as always in
my body, whether by life or
by death. For to me, living is
Christ and dying is gain. If I am
to live in the flesh, that means
fruitful labor for me; and I do
not know which I prefer. I am
hard pressed between the
two: my desire is to depart
and be with Christ, for that
is far better; but to remain in
the flesh is more necessary
for you.

Only, live your life in a manner
worthy of the gospel of Christ,
so that, whether I come and
see you or am absent and
hear about you, I will know
that you are standing firm in
one spirit, striving side by side
with one mind for the faith of
the gospel.

Matthew 20:1–16

Jesus said, “For the kingdom of
heaven is like a landowner who
went out early in the morning
to hire laborers for his vineyard.
After agreeing with the labor-
ers for the usual daily wage,
he sent them into his vineyard.
When he went out about nine
o’clock, he saw others standing
idle in the marketplace; and
he said to them, ‘You also go
into the vineyard, and I will
pay you whatever is right.’ So
they went. When he went out
again about noon and about
three o’clock, he did the same.
And about five o’clock he went
out and found others standing
around; and he said to them,
‘Why are you standing here
idle all day?’ They said to him,
‘Because no one has hired us.’
He said to them, ‘You also go
into the vineyard.’

When evening came, the
owner of the vineyard said to
his manager, ‘Call the laborers
and give them their pay, begin-
ning with the last and then
going to the first.’ When those
hired about five o’clock came,
each of them received the
usual daily wage. Now when
the first came, they thought
they would receive more; but

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each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Hearing the Word

"Our Task, our Glory"

Today's liturgy of the word inspires reflection on the theme of recognition and praise, that human beings often seek from others, in order to have their accomplishments, value and importance affirmed.

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah comes from ch. 55 of his book, which begins with an invitation to partake in God's gifts, and with an assurance that he had chosen Israel as his own people destined for great glory. This initial part culminates in Isaiah 55:5 with a remarkable declaration, that all nations "shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, ... for he has glorified you". In the context of this pledge, today's passage continues with the prophet's exhortation to the righteous Israelites to "seek the Lord, call upon him". He follows with the admonition to

the wicked Israelites to "forsake their ways", "abandon their thoughts" and "return to the Lord" to receive forgiveness and be God's people once again.

The reading concludes with the assertion that God follows his ways, which differ from and infinitely surpass human thoughts, as much as heaven towers over the earth. These verses disclose that God, for reasons that are his own, decided to glorify his people Israel and give them dignity and importance, recognized and acknowledged by all the peoples of the earth. Still, the Israelites need to respond to this offer, not by self-congratulation and prideful self-praise, but by careful cultivation of their relationship with God. They need to continually seek the Lord by living according to his commandments, being united with him through prayer, and returning to him from wayward paths. Through faithful service to the Lord the Israelites will find their glory and gain recognition as models and examples for others to follow.

The second reading comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians, which the apostle wrote while imprisoned. Because of his work for the Gospel, the apostle found himself locked up and in danger of imminent death. In this deeply unsettling context he makes two important statements. First, Paul speaks positively of his imprisonment and, surprisingly, he welcomes the prospect of death. This unusual stance reflects his remarkable faith and commitment to Christ, as

he views death as means to the full union with Christ. In fact, he is open to and welcomes any possible outcome of his captivity. If kept alive, he will continue his "fruitful labor" for the Gospel, if he dies, he will be united with Christ. His utter commitment to Christ and his mission gives him remarkable freedom to face anything that life can bring.

In the second part of the reading Paul calls Christians to imitate him by living "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ". Their commitment to the Gospel would bring him great consolation by showing them to be authentic and praiseworthy servants of the Gospel, alongside the imprisoned apostle.

Paul's words reflect the same attitude and mindset as that of Isaiah. Dignity, recognition and praise for Paul and his faithful in Philippi come from carrying out Christ's mission faithfully. Paul was not concerned about praise and recognition from others in this life. His sole concern was the task of preaching the Gospel, for which he expected the supreme reward of the union with Christ in eternity. He applies the same logic to the Christians, stating that they should focus on living according to the Gospel. This will bring them glory and reward in this world and in eternity.

The Gospel contains a story also focused on the theme of recognition and reward. Jesus told a story that narrates shocking actions of a vineyard owner who appears guilty of grossly unfair treatment of his hired workers, paying the

same amount to those hired for just an hour, and to those who work the full day. This parable carries a deeply symbolic message. Matthew uses it to justify God's inclusion of the Gentiles among God's people which, from the perspective of the Israelites, who had enjoyed that privilege for centuries, occurred only very recently. Are these two groups to reap equal benefits from this membership? Matthew answers positively – both Jews and Gentiles are equal in terms of the rewards and blessings that such membership brings. The story illustrates this equality by indicating that the sum paid to all workers in the story, regardless the length of their labor, is “one denarius” – the usual daily wage – sufficient to provide for all daily needs. The workers hired first were promised “whatever is right”, which means the amount they need to live through the day. The workers who came last were provided with the same amount, which demonstrates the master's concern for the wellbeing of all workers, not his unfairness. God is fair in that God sustains the life of all. Furthermore, none of the workers in the story had avoided work. Those hired last indicated that their idleness was not a result of calculated laziness but rather that “nobody hired them”. The landowner, knowing that they would be left without the necessary daily wage to survive, hired them even for a short time in order to ensure that they will have sufficient means to live. This again shows God's concern for providing every-

one with the opportunity to do what is necessary for life.

The workers who accused the landowner of being unfair and unjust, minded only their own interest, and sought to protect their rights and privileges. They wanted recognition and expected the reward based on their own accomplishments. Yet, that logic would mean that those hired last would starve. The story emphasizes that God's logic operates on a different principle. He gives each worker a task necessary for them to sustain life. That task is unique and appropriate for each person, and the workers have no right to question the master's decisions and actions.

The final statement about the first being last and last being first, contrary to some interpretations, does not imply that there will be a radical reversal of positions. Rather, the statement indicates that all will be made equal in terms of gifts that they receive from God. The reward and glory of life, particularly eternal life, according to Matthew, lies in completing the God-given task, a task which is unique and specific to each person, regardless of their background and history.

Seeking recognition, acknowledgement and praise is a natural and quite acceptable pursuit for human beings. Still, the first reading reminds us that true glory and praise come as a result of living a righteous and pious life according to God's laws. Paul emphasizes that Christian dignity comes from completing the task of living and preaching the

Gospel regardless of the circumstances. Finally, the Gospel demonstrates that the path to the fulness of life lies in the execution of God-given tasks particular to each person. Living according to God's ways and completion of the unique God-given tasks is, therefore, the source of personal glory in this life and leads to eternal union with the Creator, whom the Psalmist described as the Lord who “is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.”

Listening to the Word of God

This Sunday's liturgy of the word invites us to reflect on our tasks as Christians and the just recognition we expect in return. The completion of our daily tasks brings praise, acknowledgement, recognition, fulfilment and personal glory. Yet, we live in a society where many do not plan or prepare well, and perform their daily tasks poorly and chaotically. This may lead to idleness and failure. Some, however, begin their day by noting down what they want to accomplish each and every day. As Christians, our list of tasks should begin with recognition of God's power and end with gratitude for what God enabled us to do, because whatever we achieve is not done by our own strength but by God's grace. In this context, we can reflect on a few points which will help us to better understand the importance of today's message.

First, we hear the phrase, “seek the Lord while he can be found”. As Christians, when do we seek God in our lives?

Many do so only after they have tried, and failed, to find help first from other sources. Only when all else fails, the time comes to turn to God. We also tend to seek God when things are not working out well, in situations such as family problems, marriage and relationship crises, unemployment or any other difficulties. Faced with such threats we turn to God for guidance and solutions. While looking for help from our Father is certainly right, we ought to seek God at all times, in difficulties but also in good times. This is the message of the first reading where Isaiah urges us to seek the Lord and to change our lives in order to carry out our tasks well. St Mathew also tells us that our task is to seek first the kingdom of God and other things would follow. If we seek God in every moment of our lives, then we correctly acknowledge that God is the only source of lasting blessing and recognition.

Second, God has given us the task of seeking righteousness. Is it possible to accomplish such a task when the world offers so many alternative ways of living, which can lead us astray from God's ways? Isaiah admonishes us to forsake our former ways and ask God to purify our thoughts and lead us into the path of righteousness. As Christians we are to be promoters of justice and peace in our community, to cultivate Christian virtues such as honesty, rectitude and faithfulness. Today, in many families, parents are failing in their task of teaching and instructing children to walk in the way of the

Lord. Parents often passively watch their children imitate and follow examples from the media and peers. As Christians, parents and children ought to learn and follow the ways of God taught by Jesus which lead to righteousness.

Finally, St. Paul serves as a good example of seeking the right type of glory and recognition. He speaks about his complete commitment to live for Christ and for the task of proclaiming the Gospel. When we perform our tasks with such wholehearted commitment, then we will be as free as Paul, welcoming the prospects of life or death with equal confidence because God, our sole desire, will give us eternal life. From him flows the assurance that, by executing our task of living for him faithfully, we shall also share in his glory in eternity. This is the kind of glory and recognition that should be the focus of each Christian.

Proverb

“When the labourer is praised, his axe begins to cut more keenly”.

Action

Self-examination

Does my list of daily tasks involve praise and recognition of God as the source of all that I do?

Is personal prayer and reading the Word of God is one of my essential tasks for each day?

Response to God

I make a solemn promise to God that in the course of this week I will carry out my tasks with love and desire for God; I will begin and end my day with a prayer of recognition and thanksgiving.

Response to your World

In response to the word of God, I will seek to understand what God wants me to do in every situation of my life.

As a group, what activity can we devise in order to show that we have understood the message of today's liturgy?

Prayer

Merciful and gracious Lord, we praise and bless your name, because you are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Lord Jesus, we ask you to grant us wisdom and strength to carry out the specific tasks you have given us.

Help us to seek your face constantly and walk in your path of righteousness every day. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.