

23. August 2023

God is our reward

Mt 20:1-16

The kingdom of heaven is like to an householder, who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And having agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing in the market place idle. And he said to them: Go you also into my vineyard, and I will give you what shall be just. And they went their way. And again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did in like manner. But about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing, and he saith to them: Why stand you here all the day idle? They say to him: Because no man hath hired us. He saith to them: Go you also into my vineyard. And when evening was come, the lord of the vineyard saith to his steward: Call the labourers and pay them their hire, beginning from the last even to the first. When therefore they were come, that came about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first also came, they thought that they should receive more: and they also received every man a penny. And receiving it they murmured against the master of the house, saying: These last have worked but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, that have borne the burden of the day and the heats. But he answering said to one of them: Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take what is thine, and go thy way: I will also give to this last even as to thee. Or, is it not lawful for me to do what I will? Is thy eye evil, because I am good? So shall the last be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.

At first glance, the way in which God acts can sometimes seem quite incomprehensible to us, according to our human criteria. Thus, it can easily occur to us that we would agree with those who, after hard work, expected a greater reward than those who had only been working for an hour. Certainly we would also consider that a higher wage for the former would have been fair. However, that would only be to apply our human logic to the reality of the Kingdom of God, and that is precisely what the Lord wants to overcome with this parable!

In this context, I am thinking of a concrete example. Someone is a Catholic by birth, and since he can think, he has sincerely tried to keep the commandments of God and to serve the Lord. When he comes to Church, kneeling beside him is someone who has only recently found God, after having led an unrestrained and disorderly life. When the faithful are invited to receive communion, both come to the communion rail; the one who has been working in the Lord's vineyard for a long time, and the other who has just begun. And both receive the same reward!

In this way we can understand that the Kingdom of God is first and foremost about love. God invites everyone to live and act in this love. It is the gift of His grace; the grace that we all live by: those who have been cooperating with it for a long time, as well as those who accept it just before their last breath...

God's action is directed towards people's salvation (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). All His efforts are aimed at people finding their way home, to enter the Father's House, even if it is only at the last second of their lives. If people accept grace and turn to God, they will be saved.

That is why we cannot simply apply to the Kingdom of God the logic we take for granted in the „kingdom of man“. We are promised eternal life, if we keep God's commandments and follow the Lord (cf. Mt 19:16-21). And here there can be no envy if someone reaches the Kingdom of God at the last moment. On the contrary: there should reign that joy of which Jesus speaks to us in the parables; the joy of the Father in recovering his lost son (cf. Lk 15).

God's generosity, which allows even the last to enter His Kingdom, takes nothing away from our reward for having worked hard for Him, because our reward is God Himself, whom we will all receive!

In eternity there will be no more envy. Everyone will have reached perfection. No one will calculate all that he has done, nor compare whether he is at a disadvantage in relation to the other. Each will be infinitely grateful, and will praise God together with the angels and saints, and all will be filled with Him. And God will assign to each one his or her place....

This reality that awaits us must already permeate our earthly life, in which our heart, always in the process of conversion, must come to know God in His goodness ever better, and must allow itself to be shaped by Him. Then we will no longer examine whether what we have done is greater than the “efficiency” of others, nor will we believe that we deserve a greater reward from God. On the contrary, we will feel more and more blessed and graced, and we will rejoice and strive so that others will also come to know God and live as His children.