

Reflection for the Twenty Fifth Sunday of the Church's Year

Resentment and envy are never far from our hearts where money is concerned. Money breeds inequalities and perceived mistreatment. Rich or poor, money can bring out the worst in a person: greed, jealousy, selfishness, meanness, being grasping, hoarding, squandering, wastefulness and ostentation; these are all ugly, foul things associated with the effects of money. Money has the potential to poison our lives because we are rich, and it has the potential to poison our lives because we are poor.

In this morning's gospel Jesus tells a very clever parable to encourage us to reflect on our meanness, our jealousy and our grasping natures. He also uses the parable to highlight the lavish generosity of God. The setting of this parable indicates that it isn't aimed at the rich and comfortably off but rather it is aimed at ordinary working people. They too need to reflect how money can poison their hearts.

The parable is set in the world of seasonal, unskilled, hand to mouth, manual work, the world of fruit picking. The vines are ready and the window to harvest them is limited. The casual workers knew where to go to get the work. They had to be in the marketplace at daybreak. An agreement is struck with those hired first for "*a denarius a day*." There is no suggestion that this is not a fair day's pay and the workers are content to go off and work in the vineyard. Then the owner of the vineyard goes out four times more during the day taking on more labourers and Jesus is at pains to point out that these workers are feckless or idle. Nevertheless, the vineyard owner assures them, "*whatever is right I shall give you*." The grumbling starts at the end of the day when the workers come to be paid, and it is the way in which they are paid which highlights the generosity of God and brings to the surface all the petty jealousies that money can cause. The last to arrive are paid first and paid, not a twelfth of a denarius for the hour's work, but the full day's rate. Similarly, the others hired during the course of the day are not paid a proportion of the full day's rate but, once again, the same full day's rate itself. Those hired at the start of the day and who "*have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat*" are paid, as agreed, the full day's rate but they perceive its value to be diminished since it is no more than that paid to those who worked only an hour. They make their resentment clear which is in stark contrast to the generosity of the vineyard owner who states, "*I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius.....do you begrudge my generosity?*"

If we are honest with ourselves, I suspect we probably believe that those hired first do have a point and that they have been badly done by. But the parable is a real illustration of those words spoken through the prophet Isaiah in today's first reading, "*my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways*." Those hired first have suffered no injustice. Rather they, and we, lack the lavish generosity of God, and we allow money and riches to taint our vision.