

## 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2023

*Why be envious because I am generous?  
Thus the last will be first and the first last...*

Envy, sometimes described as ‘the green-eyed monster,’ is something we all experience at one time or another, to a greater or lesser extent. The other day I met a priest friend, my own age whom I hadn’t seen for a while I noticed with some envy that, unlike me he has retained his youthful looks - there was not a single grey hair to be seen anywhere on his head – unlike me he still has a trim waistline - he radiated health and vitality. I thought ‘how unfair!’

That was precisely the reaction of the labourers in today’s Gospel who have toiled hard in the heat of the day only to see those who have worked only for an hour receive the same wage. The landowner reminds them that he has stuck to the terms of the original agreement, but his reply seems to rub salt into the wound: “have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?”

To some people, this gospel story smacks of unfairness and injustice. But the story is not be about injustice – it’s about God’s generosity, a generosity we can never fully imagine nor understand. Jesus in using the story of the labourers is illustrating what Isaiah said in the reading: ‘God’s ways are not our ways. God’s thoughts are not our thoughts.’

Everything we are, everything we have, is the generous gift of God. Whenever we grumble about and feel envious of others, we are really refusing to accept our own selves from the hands of God.

Reflecting on God’s generosity however can help to release us from any envy we might have towards others, but also it can help to increase our own generosity towards them. I often find that I am reminded of God’s generosity whenever I meet someone who, in the world’s eyes seems to have little for which to thank God.

For seven years I was a part-time chaplain in a busy hospital. Walking through the wards there would never fail to lift me out of any self-piteous or depressed feelings I might have had at the time. I was continually being reminded that there are always people who are considerably worse off than ourselves.

I never fail to be moved and humbled by the patient acceptance of those who suffer terrible illnesses.

I think particularly of a lady I encountered in hospital some months ago. I'd been told she had lost both legs and that she'd just heard she needed an operation on one of her eyes. I was expecting to find her downcast and miserable, but to my astonishment she beamed at me and told me how lucky she was to be alive, how good God was to her, how grateful she was to Him for bestowing on her so many blessings.

The generosity of God is a great comfort to us. But it is also a great challenge because we are called to imitate it; to be generous in the way way we deal with one another.

St. Julie, the foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame used to say: "Oh how good is the good God." A wonderful motto for all of us to use, especially at times when we think quite the opposite.

In the coming week, when we hear ourselves complaining about our problems, our frustrations, or how unfair it is that we don't have this or that, when we find ourselves bemoaning our aches and pains or even our grey hairs and our waistlines, let us try to be grateful for what we have. A very wise person once said to me: 'Happiness is found not by having what you want but by wanting what you have.'