

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A (September 18, 2011)

A priest and a cab driver die and both are waiting at the gate in heaven for St. Peter to escort them to their new homes. St. Peter first takes the cab driver to his new home in the Kingdom: a beautiful two-story house with a built-in swimming pool. The priest thought, "Wow! This cab driver got a great deal. I can't wait to see my new home." St. Peter then proceeded to take the priest to *his* new home in the Kingdom: a small one-bedroom condo with a tiny patio and no pool! The priest said in a quandary, "This is amazing. I spent hours and hours preparing all those sermons, the hardest thing we do as priests, and the cab driver just drove people around." St. Peter responded, "Oh, yes...but when you preached, the people slept; when the cab driver drove, they prayed!"

Even in heaven we like to compare our lot with the lot of others. We compete and believe that those who merit a good life and a good death are those who work to gain God's favor. The priest in the story just didn't think it was fair. But life is rarely fair when we judge fairness on how *we* think and believe...when we quantify our lives, our love and our forgiveness. To quote the prophet Isaiah in the first reading, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord."

The parable of the landowner and laborers teaches us that our God's compassion and generosity are boundless and unreasonable by our standards. This story is not about labor relations and the manner in which people are paid: this behavior could never be tolerated in our world. The parable is meant to startle us into a new reality...into a new vision of how we are to see our God. The story is meant to shed light on the darkness of envy and jealousy: we want what the other has and we want to be treated better than those we consider less valuable. If not, life isn't fair.

Parents have to teach their children how to navigate in a world that seems to lack fairness by strengthening them to face failure and to never compare themselves to any other human being. Children need to learn that not everyone gets an award; not everyone is chosen for the team; not everyone has the same talents and gifts. It is said that today's people lack little in the area of self-esteem, but are lacking in self-discipline. It takes *much* discipline to be grateful for what one has and to try and rejoice in another's good fortune instead of grasping in jealousy.

No, God's ways are not our ways; nor are his thoughts our thoughts. But Jesus tells these difficult parables to awaken us into living life differently. The Liturgy is our worship and it is also our discipline. Our participation in the Liturgy gradually changes the way we think so that our thoughts and ways are more like God's. This is the story of conversion...to be grateful for a one-bedroom condo and to be truly happy that another is living in a beautiful mansion. Only God can make this happen.