

25A 2017 SML  
MT 20:1-16

Give or take some time in purgatory, the bottom line is there is no justice in salvation.

This evening's (morning's) Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard is a parable found only in Matthew. It is not found in Mark. It is not found in Luke and it is not found in John. It is a parable addressed to Matthew's audience, an audience comprised of hard core, inner circle Jews, an audience very comfortable with the Old Testament law, an audience very comfortable with a system of checks and balances, an audience very familiar with the old saying, "a day's wage for an honest day's work."

Matthew's audience was raised in the Old Testament mentality of rigorous justice. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is an understatement as the Jewish Old Testament reads in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy:

- ✓ Life for life
- ✓ Eye for eye
- ✓ Tooth for tooth
- ✓ Hand for hand
- ✓ Foot for foot

- ✓ Burn for burn
- ✓ Wound for wound
- ✓ Stripe for stripe

There is much wisdom to be found the Old Testament's system of check and balances as exacting justice guards against excessive vengeance. In other words, if I correct your son, you cannot kill mine. If you take up two parking spaces, I cannot run my key along your car fender. However, as I explained in last Sunday's homily, even an eye for an eye has its problems. Suppose my eye sees better than your eye? Suppose my ox is worth more than your ox? Exacting justice has its problems.

In this evening's (morning's) gospel, the issue is not wages. The issue here is salvation and Matthew's audience, of hard core inner circle Jews, who saw themselves as the laborers hired at dawn, were thinking with their all too familiar mentality of rigorous justice.

So here you go:

1. I am a law abiding Jew my entire life.
2. I have followed the dictates of rigorous justice toward my neighbor and my God to a tee.

3. I have now converted to Christianity and follow the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth exactly.
4. In so doing, I am APOSUNAGOGES “out of the synagogue.”
5. I am forbidden to enter the synagogue.
6. I have been fired from my job.
7. My wife and my kids have disowned me.
8. When my kids see me walking down the street, they spit at me and cross to the other side.

And now you tell me these Gentiles, the 5:00 crowd in the parable, who up until 5:00, have worshipped their false gods made of stone, their riches, who enjoyed their temple prostitution, will receive salvation the same as me? Well, I find no justice in salvation.

So here you go – the Catholic hired at dawn:

1. I have been good Catholic my entire life:
2. Baptized
3. altar boy
4. 12 years of a good solid Catholic education
5. married in the Church to a good Catholic woman
6. followed the teachings of the Catholic Church

7. never practiced birth control
8. have 9 beautiful children to prove it
9. not exactly a walk in the park, but I did it.

And now you tell me this poor slob, from the 5:00 crowd, who has lived the life of Reilly and more than his share of wine, woman and song, and is now making a deathbed conversion, will receive salvation the same as me? Not exactly. Give or take the time spent in purgatory, but at the end of purgatory, yes, the saint and the deathbed converter will be saved just the same.

Each and every one of us is carrying a major flaw in moral character. It may not be obvious to the naked eye, but you know, and God knows, what your major flaw in moral character is. You can look at the Swift Family and think what a great family, and we are, but believe you me, the Swift Family and the members in the Swift Family are far from perfect. One of my Mother's favorite sayings is, "I'd like a page out of their book," which can either mean their check book or their "book of life," "the whole story." And it would make for interesting reading.

Since each of us carries a major flaw in moral character, salvation would be impossible if it depended upon rigorous justice. Salvation would be impossible if it depended upon nothing more than how we lived our lives. It was not until Jesus died on the cross that the gates of heaven were opened. All of the Old Testament greats were not granted heaven until Jesus died on the cross, hence the reason why the Apostles Creed says,

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead.

After Jesus died, he descended to the dead. A poorer translation says “He descended into hell.” Where Jesus went was “Sheol,” which is defined as “a place where God is not.” All the Old Testament greats: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, the judges, all the prophets, all good people who died before Jesus opened the gates of heaven went to “Sheol,” because Old Testament rigorous justice demanded no more and no less than what was deserved, and salvation was not deserved.

Jesus’ death on a cross does not fit in the Old Testament mentality of rigorous justice. Jesus’ death on a cross fits into God’s mentality of extravagant generosity. Jesus’ death on a cross makes us all part of the 5:00 crowd. Salvation for any

one of us is generous because each of us has a major flaw in moral character.

So give or take the amount of time in purgatory, you are right to say there is no justice in salvation.