

25th Sunday A (Matt 20:1-16)

In our Gospel today, Jesus tells a story about a group of people who felt cheated by life. That feeling isn't uncommon today, and it's often understandable. Life isn't always fair. No baby deserves to be born into grinding poverty and hunger, but many are. Children ought not grow up in homes that are filled with hostility, bitterness, and abuse, but many do. Often natural catastrophes and diseases afflict us unfairly. Feeling cheated by life is a fairly common experience.

And then there are those of us to whom life has been mostly fair, sometimes even generous, and yet we may find ourselves being cheated. What brings on the feeling that life has been unfair to me? Perhaps it's an overload of work, a dreary day, or Monday morning blues. Or maybe it's something more serious and enduring. With the people in our Gospel story, their feeling was generated by an unfavorable comparison of themselves with others. They had worked a full day and were paid the usual daily wage. Others had worked only one hour and were paid the same amount. And those who worked the longer hours felt cheated.

That kind of comparison is a common occurrence. We seldom compare our lot in life with those who have less. We compare what we have with those who have more, and we begin to feel cheated. What are the consequences of this type of thinking? What happens to people when they become convinced that life has singled them out for unfair treatment?

All people who feel cheated by life have at least one thing in common- they are all unhappy. The moment you and I convince ourselves that we have been singled out for unfair treatment, we will say goodbye to happiness. It will never be ours again until and unless we change our thoughts and feelings about life.

St. Ignatius Loyola has a liberating concept in his SPIRITUAL EXERCISES. He speaks of using all created things, anything other than God, as a help to our happiness here and our happiness in the next life with God. He speaks of a kind of detachment or an attitude of balance, and with such an attitude, we become a freer person, free of comparison, self-pity, resentment, feelings of unfairness, and what may keep us bound and unfree.

Counting our blessings and developing an attitude of gratefulness for all the good things we have experienced and continue to experience in our lives is of extreme importance, essential if we are to be people of happiness. People of gratitude are always nice to be around for they are usually people of sound mental health. This is the message of Jesus Christ who over and over again tells us to be not afraid and to accept his great gift of peace. And with grateful hearts we remember him in the Eucharist.

Al Grosskopf, S.J.