

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle A
Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air
September 18, 2011 10:30am and 12noon

The Question

[STEVEN]

There is a stinging question in today's gospel parable.

"Are you envious because I am generous?" Those who have worked all day complain because the vineyard owner decides to pay those who have worked less the same amount, and so the owner confronts them with this question.

Envy

[MICHAEL]

What's important to note here is that if these workers who are hired earlier would not know what the later hires get paid, there would be no problem.

But they do know and that is why they are upset. They are envious of the other workers.

[STEVEN]

They compare themselves and the amount of their work and their pay with the others and they are really upset. Now, Jesus is not teaching anything here about management practices or wage and salary scales.

That's not the point. He is teaching an important personal lesson to each one of us.

Jesus is teaching that we can be envious. We can feel discontented and resentful when we compare ourselves and what we have with others.

This is the core of envy – comparing. Comparing ourselves with others is the seedbed of envy.

Compare and Despair

[MICHAEL]

One of our Catholic spiritual writers today talks about envy.

He gives this simple, pointed saying: Compare and despair. Compare and despair.

Humanly speaking, we are easily tempted to compare our life and lifestyle with others. The problem is that when we do this, we can so easily feel down about ourselves and resentful of others.

Compare and despair. This is envy.

[STEVEN]

When we compare, we often minimize our own gifts and maximize the gifts of others. We easily minimize or overlook our academic or athletic or musical or leadership ability.

We easily maximize or overstate the same gifts in others. Compare and despair – the root of envy.

[MICHAEL]

And when we compare, we often maximize our problems and minimize those of others. We maximize or overstate the struggles in our family or our financial challenges and on it goes.

We easily minimize or overlook the very same realities in others. Compare and despair – the root of envy.

Avoiding Envy

[STEVEN]

So, how do we avoid envy? How do we avoid comparing and despairing?

What does Jesus want us to do? There are three important practices here.

First, stay glued to the gospels. These are to be the core of our personal and spiritual formation.

The gospels consistently show that God loves each one of us equally and personally. The vineyard owner in today's parable is conveying this wonderful truth in the way he pays all the workers.

[MICHAEL]

Second, in a good way, we need to keep focused on ourselves. Each day we need to look at what we have – this day of life, family members, a friend, our computer skill or sense of humor, our food and water and home that we easily take for granted.

It is so easy to overlook who we are and what we have. It is easy to miss God's gifts because everything is in truth a gift from God.

[STEVEN]

And third, each day we need to thank God. We need to thank God for one thing, and something specific.

This positive gratitude to God will leave little room for the negative envy of others. So be thankful every day.

Conclusion

[MICHAEL]

So, a stinging question from a vineyard owner.

“Are you envious because I am generous?” A question with a powerful lesson.