

SEPTEMBER 24, 2017

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

READING 1 [IS 55:6-9](#);

RESPONSORIAL PSALM [PS 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18](#): R. **The Lord is near to all who call upon him.**

READING 2 [PHIL 1:20C-24, 27A](#)

GOSPEL [MT 20:1-16A](#)

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o'clock, the landowner saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.' So they went off. And he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o'clock, the landowner found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.' When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat.' He said to one of them in reply, 'My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

HOMILY

Last week I traveled to our family home, to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the death of my mother. Because time was tight, I didn't make the 9-hour car trip, but traveled via what used to be called "the friendly skies," which are far from friendly now! My first flight home was a moderately small 50-seat plane, flying from Detroit to Chicago, with even more moderately-sized "overhead compartments" which were, together with "space underneath the seats in front of you," the options for our carry-on luggage. Because of the \$50 per bag charge, airplane cabins have become a battleground, a race for the limited space to cram as much as possible, rather than pay that odious fee! Actually, things at first went rather well on this flight, passengers displaying patience, including this one. I had carried my carefully measured bag (22" X 14" X 9") on the plane and fit it snugly in the overhead compartment, then settled with a good book and adequate leg room under that seat in front of me until. . .

One last-minute, harried looking man appeared at the front of the cabin and made his way to the one empty seat, right in front of me, in the spacious exit row (a cause of envy for us crammed in the mere coach seats). But this was not the most disturbing thing. What was disturbing was his enormous duffle bag, which, being in an exit row, he could not put under the seat in front of him (forbidden by safety rules!). So, he reached up and opened the overhead compartment ahead of mine and found a tiny space into which he began to cram his oversized bag. Meanwhile, the flight attendant was barking over the intercom, "passengers should please stow all bags and take your seats as we are preparing to taxi," though she was actually not speaking to "PASSENGERS" at all, but this ONE, single man—we all knew that! Another passenger commented to me, "that's not going to fit," while another one, who had a tight connection in Chicago, rose and began to help the man to wedge the bag into the compartment, so that we could take off. When the bag seemed mostly inside the compartment, then each man took a hold of one of the handles of the compartment door and attempted to slide it closed over the bulging bag, finally

producing a grating, grinding sound and total lock up—the compartment door had a compound fracture. Next entering this comedy was the flight attendant and apparent proprietor of the airline, who declared with no small degree of condemnation, “you broke MY overhead compartment” . . . not THE overhead compartment, but MY overhead compartment. This was personal! At this point, she went to tattle to the captain, who shut down the engine and declared the penalty we would all share: we could not take off until the compartment door was fixed, producing an audible groan across the plane. After ten minutes or so, a small maintenance truck pulled up outside the plane, and out jumped two cheery men in maintenance uniforms. They boarded the plane, extricated the wedged bag, and then jimmied with the derailed compartment door for the briefest time (apparently they had done this before!), and popped it back into sliding position, to the cheers of the passengers. All’s well that ends well . . . right? Not quite. . . the “owner of the plane,” or at least of HER overhead compartment, returned to deal with that dislodged bag. Taking charge, this flight attendant opened MY overhead compartment (yes, it was MINE!), pointed at my perfectly-sized, neatly-stowed bag and asked accusatorily, “whose bag is this?” To which I tentatively raised my hand. She fixed her gaze on me and said, “it’s going to have to move under your seat, so we can put this bigger bag there, so that we can take off.” Suddenly my legs began to cramp, just thinking about it! Other passengers watched anxiously . . . talk about peer pressure . . . but actually, talk about Gospel pressure!

Right there, at that moment, today’s gospel came to mind. Really! For I was immediately tempted to think, “Sorry, Mister Big Bag, I was here first, I followed the rules, I was here in plenty of time, as the rules require, and I am just sitting here, with at least some leg room, righteous, and here you come, at the last minute, baggage rule breaker, and expect special treatment! I was just like those righteous workers in the vineyard, on time, hard-working, following the rules, and here comes this Johnny-come-lately, expecting me to give up MY space for him and, worse, give up the comfort of my leg room. It’s not fair! Joining those righteous workers in the gospel, in my situation, I was thinking, “It’s not fair!” But . . . being fair has nothing to do with being a Christian—instead of fair, I am meant to be merciful—as the Father has been merciful to me. The gospel teaches that God’s mercy is not based on my meriting it, or my hard and faithful observance of His laws (and I don’t always do that anyway!), but only because of God’s goodness do I know mercy! And so, my bag went under the seat in front of me, I really ended up having plenty of room, and I did not end up as a priest featured on a You Tube video, being dragged off the plane. But, more importantly, the gospel call to mercy was met and fulfilled.

The message of today’s gospel, this perplexing story of the late comers to the harvest who yet are shown rich mercy, is two-fold: **FIRST**: Because of my many failings, I am the late-comer to the harvest. For too long, I have been unloving, angry, unkind, resentful, petty, or just disagreeable. Yet—even coming late, finally turning from my failings, I expect to be treated with mercy—and behold, God’s breathtaking mercy does not give me what I deserve—he gives me pardon and love! And He has done it many times! **SECOND**: When others are late-comers, whether with an oversized bag on a plane, or an oversized-ego on behind the wheel of a car, or an oversized selfishness, because we have been shown mercy, WE late comers, we must show other late-comers mercy and pardon too. So, yes, please, take my place in the overhead compartment, take my place in traffic, take my forgiveness when you’ve wronged me—even if I have to grit my teeth—for THIS late-comer knows where you’re coming from, other late-comer, and as I have been shown mercy: receive mercy, in the unfriendly skies, on the unfriendly roads, or anyway else we’re traveling this road of life. For, because of God’s good mercy, even those who are late to treat me with fairness, wherever that might be, are due mercy. And, the gospel demands it will need to be given through my hands.