

## Homily Notes for Sunday, September 24, 2017, 25<sup>th</sup> A

Is 55:6-9 Phil 1:20-24, 27 Mt 20:1-16

**1. Summary:** To obtain the good things of the Lord we must know His thoughts and ways. To do this we must know Scripture.

**2. Basic theme in our study:** Let us note what the lectionary readings contain and what they do not contain. For example, in today's reading from the Old Testament, verses 10-11 are not included. They explain how to achieve what is talked about in verses 6-9, that is the Word of God.

**3. Also to note, the story of the Rich Young Man,** Matthew 19:16-30, is not included in any of the Sunday readings (Cf Mark 10:17-31 which is included on a Sunday). This is the reading that St. John Paul II used to introduce his Encyclical: the Splendor of Truth, his major Encyclical on moral theology.

**4. 1<sup>st</sup> reading:** How are we to seek the Lord? How would we know that we might be a scoundrel or doing evil? The Word of God is where we find our correction. Since the Lord's thoughts and ways are so far different from ours, how can we know Him? See the two verses that follow the reading:

“As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.

For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, Giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats,

So shall my Word be that goes forth from my mouth;

It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

Clearly the Scripture tells us that it is to the Word of God that we should turn for this. We must remember that it must be the Sacred Scripture, the Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium working together through the teaching of the Church that give us truth (Cf 2 Thess 2:15, 1 Tim 3:15, CCC 85-87).

**5. Psalm Response:** How gracious and merciful, compassionate and just is our Lord. He is near to *all who call upon him in truth.*” How can we know that we are calling upon Him “in truth?” Can we base this on our own feelings, emotions, or experiences? We must base it upon his Revelation, his truth, which comes to us through the Sacred Scriptures and Tradition as interpreted and taught by the Church.

**6. 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading:** Here St Paul gives a tremendous testimony to his own assurance of salvation. He knows that to remain in this world will be good for the others, though he himself would be happy to go to heaven. He gives the Philippians a condition: that they conduct themselves “in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

In this reading, Paul speaks as one who has put on the mind of Christ. He says that he does not know whether he prefers to live or die. The ordinary human point of view is one that greatly prefers life to death. But the perspective of God is different. Paul says that to die would be good because it would bring him into greater unity with Christ. On the other hand, to live would also be good because it would allow Paul to continue his work as an apostle. *Having taken on the perspective of God,* Paul is equally ready to live or die. Paul is an example of how grace operates. His own wishes are subordinated to the needs of the Philippians, and both Paul and the Philippians enjoy the privilege of believing in Christ and of suffering for him. Being a Christian means accepting God's word. That is how “*we conduct ourselves worthy of the gospel of Christ.*”

**7. Gospel:** Paying workers in this way is not the way to run a business! One would never have workers showing up on time. But this does not describe a business. It represents our one life in which we have one time around to gain salvation. God is merciful and gracious to allow even those who repent and believe at the end of their lives to gain salvation. Here, this parable allows us to understand correctly the ways and thoughts of God, which, of course, come to us through the Scriptures.

**8. Aim of the parable:**

i) *As a warning to the disciples:* Jesus teaches his disciples not to claim any special honor or any special place because they are closely associated with him or because they are the first members of Christianity. All the people,

no matter when they come, are equally precious to God. Similarly, long-time Church members should expect no special preference over recent members.

(ii) As a definite warning to the Jews. As the chosen people of God the Jews looked down upon the Gentiles. Jesus warns them that the Gentiles who put their faith in God will have the same reward a good Jew may expect. Matthew, by retelling this parable, probably wants to give the same warning to the members of his Judeo-Christian community who considered the Gentile Christians as second-class, come lately Christians.

(iii) As an explanation by Jesus of His love for the publicans and sinners. Through this parable, Jesus describes the loving concern, generosity and mercy of God his Father which he reflects in his life.

(iv) For us to be able and willing to accept those who come late to the faith.

**9. Why this strange type of recruiting?** The grapes ripened towards the end of September. It was the monsoon time of heavy rains. If the harvest were not finished before the rains started, it would be ruined. Hence the vineyard owners recruited every one willing to work, from the market place. The fact that some of them stood around until even five o'clock in the evening proves how desperately they wanted to support their families. One denarius or a drachma was the normal day's wage for a working man for his work from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**10. The seemingly unjust remuneration for work:** This story illustrates the difference between God's perspective and ours. Perhaps it disturbs our sense of fairness and justice. Our sense of justice seems to favor the laborers who worked all day and expected a wage greater than that given to the latecomers. Perhaps most people would sympathize with the workers who had worked longer and seemingly deserved more. We can understand their complaint since, for most of us, salaries are linked to the number of hours of work. A skilled worker gets more than an unskilled worker. If workers have the same skills, the same hours of work and similar responsibilities, we expect them to get the same wages.

**11. But this has to do with salvation, not a way to run a business.** God so loved the world that He gave his only Son for our sins. He wishes all to be saved and not everyone is saved right away. God's perspective is that of the author of salvation, who will give the gift of salvation both to those who come early and those who come late. The fact is that God's presence, God's grace, God's way of acting is a great equalizer that disregards presumed privileges and surprises us by raising up those we think unworthy. Actually, God sees the heart of the person so God is the one who can truly be fair.

During His earthly mission, Jesus, like the vineyard owner, continually went out searching for those who seemed to be lost. Hence our challenge is to recognize and accept with gratitude God's *Amazing Grace*. We must remember that there is more to life than the logic of action and reward. There is the generosity of Life, that is, the Trinitarian God, who has made us His co-workers in His vineyard.

**12. How important is it that Catholics know Sacred Scripture?**

See the sheet on "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church". This comes from Vatican II.

This is very strong. It should warm the heart of any Baptist!

**13. How can we learn Sacred Scripture? First, through the readings in the Mass.** We should read these prayerfully before coming to Mass and compare our thoughts to those preached. We can read the daily readings, even if we cannot come to Mass. They are in the bulletin as well as in *The Word Among Us*. In English, we study the Bible on Tuesday evenings.

**14. Note that Matthew Kelly in *Rediscovering Catholicism*, when describing the Seven Pillars of Catholic Spirituality, identifies the fourth as the Bible.** His recommendation for Bible study matches almost exactly the description of Jeff Cavins' *The Great Adventure*. This Bible study puts everything into context in the historical record of the Bible. Note that the next two Tuesdays finish up "The Great Adventure."

**15. What do you think it is that God has in mind for you to pick up from Him at this Mass in order to become the better-version-of-yourself that He desires?**

**What is your particular strategy in life to learn better the content and meaning of the Scriptures?**

**Is there anyone you know who might think they have been "too bad too long" to be saved? How might you encourage them? Can you think of anyone out on the "periphery" who needs encouragement?**