

Surprising Salaries

*A Missionary Commentary on the
Sunday Readings*

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 55:6-9

Psalms 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

Matthew 20:1-16a

[USCCB link to the Sunday Readings](#)

“Please come to my house, and have a cup of tea with my family. We would love to have you, it will be a blessing for us.”

A passerby, especially a foreigner, will commonly find Chilean friends in working-class neighborhoods insisting on a visit, even when we might be only casually walking by. No one was planning on it, so a surreptitious ripple of activity can be sensed in the backs of the houses on the street, with the children sent out with a plate or a pot to the nearest neighbors for a little sugar, a few small loaves of bread, some jam, until an impressive spread on a beautifully set table is achieved for the guest in a matter of minutes.

The phenomenon is known locally as “making a cow”—that is, from small contributions from each member of a group, a feast is produced for everyone. Many of us who arrive in developing nations from our relatively wealthier countries are often surprised and touched by the joy, exuberance and spontaneous generosity at such moments of welcome and laughter.

We know they don’t have much, and the thought occurs to us that it would be better for people to save the expense and just give us a glass of water, but we sense that we are experiencing an important cultural value and way of life different from our own, and perhaps we are discovering something new in our lives—relationships trumping financial considerations.

Our responsorial Psalm 145 sums it up nicely: “The Lord is near to all who call upon him,” without exceptions, whatever claims of entitlement arise. May we humbly open our lives to grow in the ways of God, ways that the economically challenged of many nations already know well, and model for the rest of us.

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Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

While exiled in Babylon, the prophet relays God's message to his people to seek the Lord in the land they now are forced to live in, without regard to the Temple, now lying destroyed and distant in a desolate Jerusalem. God is near to them, forgiving them, because his ways and thoughts are not even remotely like the ways and thoughts of human beings

Second Reading

Paul writes this letter from prison, and shares his personal experience of eternal life in Christ as something he has already begun to live. Death—perhaps arriving soon, for him--will bring an intensification of life in Christ, not an end nor even a beginning in it.

Gospel

This parable about an affirmative-action employer, so to speak, defends Jesus' special concern for those on the margins of Jewish society (he is known, after all, as 'a friend of tax collectors and sinners,' according to Mt 11:19). The vineyard is a traditional symbol for Israel (see Is 5:1-7, and Jer 12:10), and the time for harvest is at hand, requiring more and more workers--referring to the approaching last judgement.

*Notes and commentary by Fr. Bob Mosher,
a member of the Missionary Society of Saint Columban.*

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