

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

LATE ARRIVALS

SUNDAY READINGS:

Isaiah 55:6-9

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

Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

Matthew 20:1-16a

MISSION COMMENTARY

In our chapel communities in Chile, sometimes the leaders or founding families of the community maintain a prestigious role for too long, and do not give it up willingly, nor easily. They are sometime called the “apernados”—the “bolted-down” ones—by their more frustrated critics.

Foreign missionaries, both lay and consecrated, are generally at pains not make decisions for the community in such circumstances, although it sometimes seems a lot simpler to just ask the foreigners or the clergy to resolve the crisis. However, that would perpetuate an antiquated model of Church, where the authorities rule over the community, instead of serving the community by organizing and accompanying a process of community discussion, prayer and discernment, much like the synodal process—the process of “walking together”—that our universal Church has been living through for the past several years.

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We certainly need to take to heart the complaints and feelings of those who bore “the burden of the day and the heat” throughout their lives as workers in the vineyards of the Lord, to use a phrase from today’s parable in the Gospel of St. Matthew. But in the end, the generosity of God, who is the true Owner of our enterprise, must be recognized as paramount when new, fresh proposals and perspectives are offered by those who may have arrived at a late hour, and are still new to the dynamics of a community dedicated to continuing the mission of Christ.



It’s a delicate dance, but if the focus is like Paul’s, in today’s second reading, decisions can be made on the basis of continuing the mission of Christ, in a more efficacious manner. Christ is everything, and as long as Christ is celebrated, preached, and the source of the life of the community, nothing else really matters.

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

This passage is taken from a portion of Isaiah written down during the Exile in Babylon (597-538 BCE) by members of his school of disciples, according to Biblical scholars. Since the Temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed, along with the city, there is no mention here of searching for the Lord in the sanctuary, but elsewhere. Paradoxically, the Lord is near for a time, comforting and merciful, but also far away in his thinking and ways.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

Both God's greatness and his care for the entire human race are praised in these selected verses from Psalm 145, as the inspired composer moves from writing down verbs of blessing and praise, to describing the awesome deeds of God himself.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

Paul's hope and confidence is that, just as in the past, now and in the future, both his life and his death will glorify God. Christ is Paul's life whether he lives or dies, and thus Paul will be content to remain for an extended time, if that benefits the Christian community at Philippi more.

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16a

This "Parable of the Good Employer" explains to Jesus' critics how repentant tax collectors and sinners, who can be said to have arrived late in their lives to work in God's vineyard, are loved as deeply and generously as those who bore "the burden of the day and the heat" throughout their lives. All will equally experience the wages of salvation.

Notes and Commentary by by Fr. Bob Mosher,
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