

Homily for September 19, 1999
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 55:6-9
Philippians 1:20-24-27a
Matthew 20:1-16a

We are building a kingdom, which begins in our hearts.

Now isn't this a wonderful story... don't you just feel outraged by the injustice of it all? ...The very fact that those coming to work late in the day would be given the same as those who worked all day and they in turn are even asked to watch the injustice because those hired first are paid last.

Well, if you feel outraged, rest easy – it means you're a sinner and available for salvation...and so am I. This story always bothers me. The issue for us is not whether God is gracious (we've long since learned that, if we pay any attention at all). No, the problem for us is that God is just too gracious; extravagantly and indiscriminately gracious; generous to a fault. It's simply not fair!

That's where the real rub comes – fairness... comparison. We just can't help comparing ourselves to others as did the workers in the parable. We want to say, "Come on God – be fair!" Fairness isn't a problem for God, whose mercy and love extend to all; no, fairness is a problem for you and me, whose mercy and love do not. For folks, in the parable and for us, our sense of personal worth is based upon seeing ourselves

in contrast to others. Neither they nor we can rejoice in the owner's generosity because in comparative thinking such generosity robs of us something. Jesus' mission calls upon all followers to relinquish any idea that they are called and blessed because they are better than others or that they earned it. That's why we bristle at this parable because we just can't shake the mode of comparative thinking.

But by listening to this story, over time, deep in our hearts is planted the seed of the Kingdom where strict justice by our standards is thrown out completely and all is gift.

That's what it means to be church...not a building – but a people – to have deep in our hearts the meaning of human life – that Jesus lives and that all is gift.

Just how much the Church is a people first and a building second is reflected in this prayer read on the anniversary of the dedication of a church, "God our Father, from living stones, your chosen people, you built an eternal temple to your glory. Increase the spiritual gifts you have given your Church, so that your faithful people may continue to grow into the new and eternal Jerusalem."

"Living stones," people like you and me, have been hearing this gospel and getting upset about it in this

parish since 1938; our own pioneer parishioners first celebrated Mass in the Community Building across the street. We're remembering our heritage this weekend, remembering some of our glorious past. One of the unique features of Our Lady of the Rosary parish is the fact that the phrase, "Living Stones" has somewhat of a literal meaning for us. I call your attention to the brass plaques located on the walls of our church. Each plaque actually has behind it a miniature time capsule that was part of Our Lady of the Rosary's fund-raising efforts to build the present church. As the fund drive mechanism, our little parish became the "Church of One Thousand Cornerstones." Each family was requested to pledge 5% of one year's gross income. In return each family received a small time capsule attached to a 4x2½-inch brass plate bearing the family's name. The 6-inch long hollow time capsules could contain photos, family histories, and other mementos. Presently we have about 270 time capsules in our walls. Original plans specify that the time capsules remain in place for one hundred years or until the church is razed or replaced. From time to time folks will stop by the parish office and ask to take a look at their time capsule - to try to locate it on the wall and usually will spend some time telling the story of their family in the Greenhills area. Living stones...that's who we are, hearing the word of God, being upset by this parable and challenged by others like it but sharing the faith and handing it on to other generations.

But lest we become enamored of the physical, when we say "church" we really are saying "people" so that the building is a house for the church. I'm going to call upon one of those "living stones," a Greenhills Pioneer, to remember whatever. (4:45 p.m. Mrs. Betty Young; 9:00 a.m. Morris Walsh; 11:30 a.m. Mr. Ron Otting)

The American author, Willa Cather, wrote in her novel, *Ob Pioneers!*, "The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman." It is true for us as a parish. Our Lady of the Rosary began and continues to this day in the hearts of its founders and in our hearts and in the quiet determination of all of us.

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