

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 18, 2011

Deacon Tom Barford

As we come together to celebrate this 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time we hear Jesus say in the gospel, "Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

I came across an interesting story this week about the building of the suspension bridge across the Niagra River right next to Niagra Falls. The very first bridge to link Canada and the US over the falls was a footbridge built in 1848. The engineers knew that for them to build the suspension bridge they had to find a way to string a huge steel cable across the span. But the water was treacherous. They could not do it by boat. And remember this was 1848, so they couldn't do it by airplane either. How could they get this huge cable across?

The story goes that a 10 year old boy solved their problem. The engineers heard that there was a little boy who was an excellent kite flier. So they got him to fly a kite with strong, thin filament, actually a thread attached to it. The boy was so good a kite flier that he was able to stand on one side, fly the kite really high, and then direct the kite to land on the other side where other engineers were waiting. Once they had the kite, they had the thread across the water.

They then tied a stronger string and pulled that across, and then an even stronger string. Then the ropes came, stronger and stronger. Then they sent across the first steel cable, a thin one, then a stronger one and a stronger one, until they were able to string the support steel cable across the water. Once that cable was across, they could begin building the bridge.

Now I ask you, which was more important? The strong steel cable or the thin string? Maybe the strong one did the heavy lifting, but that thin string was just as important as every other string, rope or cable that crossed that water. Just as in our eyes all the ropes and cables are important so we are the same in the eyes of God. We are all part of God's plan whether our role is little or big, whether we have worked for the Lord all our lives or have recently returned to our faith.

God gives his grace according to how he perceives the work that is done, according to his standards, not according to ours. God sees the hard work that might be only that of a thread as well as the hard work of the rope and the steel cable.

I think that this is what the gospel reading today is about. The parable about the last hired receiving the same wages as the first hired. God sees our individual effort and rewards this effort generously. God's standards are not like ours.

Sometimes I hear a person say, "I am not as good as him, or her." That is wrong. We do not have the right to compare ourselves with others, positively or negatively. It is wrong for someone to say, "I am better than him." It is also wrong to say, "I am not as good as her."

No! God has a purpose for each of us. Only God knows what that purpose is. Only God knows how well we fulfill that purpose.

I think sometimes you and I give up too easily on ourselves. We have a bad day, not because we are feeling badly, but because we foolishly decide to go along with the crowd and behave badly. And then we become upset with ourselves because we know we are better than that, we want to follow Christ, but sometimes lose our way. We all do this because we are human beings. St. Paul put it this way in the Letter to the Romans, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Wretched man that I am! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin."

We cannot give up on ourselves!

We should never give up on ourselves!

And we are wrong if we compare ourselves to others!

So, never feel as though we are not as good as someone else

We are each created to be unique reflections of God's love. We do not have the right to compare our reflection to anyone else's. God created us for who each of us is when we do everything possible to let him work in us. We need to do our best, to be our best and let God take care of the rest.

I remember the words that Fr. Lavelle used to say to all of us, "We need to learn how to forgive ourselves." And we need to understand how the most precious gift of the seven sacraments will help us to understand God's love for each one of us as an individual as we try to be better Christians.

The last hired were paid first.

Thus, this parable of the vineyard is the Lord's call to all of us who have received his word and sacrament to share generously with all people what we ourselves have freely received. All of us are to share equally in the task with whatever gifts we have received, whether called early or late, to build up the kingdom of God in this world.

God's ways are not the ways of humans. And we thank God for that!