

TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME,  
YEAR A, SEPTEMBER 20, 2020

**The last will be first and the first will be last"  
(Matthew 20:16, Mark 10:30).**

Our Lord used a similar expression after speaking to a rich young man who wanted to know what he should do to enter the kingdom of heaven. That young fellow claimed to have kept all the commandments. And perhaps we should believe him! However, when our Lord told him to sell his belongings and give it all to the poor, he refused and abandoned the noble project of seeking to enter the kingdom. In the eyes of the world he was in the fast lane or #1 lane. He was getting ahead in the world, but not in the things of the kingdom - the things that matter to God. How hard it was for such a young man to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:23). Concerning such an attitude that ranked the riches of this world more important than the things of God, our Lord said, "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Matthew 19:30).

In another context, when James and John tried to wangle their way to get ahead of the rest of the Apostles; they received cold shoulders from their colleagues. The Lord took that opportunity to deliver this eternal lesson, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all" (Mark 10:42-44).

In the gospel passage read today from St Matthew (20:1-16), we have, "The last will be first, and the first will be last. The sense here may be that "All who respond to the call of Jesus, at whatever time (first, last, in the early morning or late evening), will be treated the same in respect to inheriting the benefits of the kingdom, which is the gift of God." For all the workers were paid the same amount of money irrespective of the time they came to work.

How does this message tie in with the first reading? The first reading is God's invitation to sinners and scoundrels to abandon their sinful ways and return to the right way. "Seek the LORD while he may be found, call him while he is near. Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked his thoughts; let him

turn to the LORD for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving (Isaiah 55:6-7). Responding to this invitation one should not worry about how late it was when one heard the good news. The important thing is to respond without delays, ifs or buts. We should not worry how early or late this message comes. The message is for us, dear brothers and sisters. We are sinners. Do not be deterred by the lie that God will not receive or forgive you because you have lived too long in sin. God's ways are not our ways. For God, the important thing is that you have left sin and idleness and came to work. That is turning over a new leaf. It might be at the eleventh hour that you realized that you are driving on the wrong lane of life. The important thing is that you have finally turned into the right lane.

The only mistake is to go back to the vomit. For instance, if you have fallen into a particular sin because of a circumstance in your life, do not remain in it or go back to it after you have converted. Suppose something happened in your life and you were mad at God so you took a nosedive into the opposite direction and immersed yourself in what you knew to be a sinful situation. This could be an illicit relationship, illicit marriage, a sinful lifestyle, substance abuse or something else. Do not remain in that lifestyle when you hear the voice of the Lord.

Remember his words, "If today you hear his voice harden not your heart" (Psalm 95:8). The Responsorial Psalm today reminds us of this truth. "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness" (Psalm 145:8). For example, if you are married outside the Church or in a second or third marriage without proper annulment then seek annulment and marry properly if you love each other. Let the word of the Lord come true in your life. "The last will be first and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16).

May the soul of Sullivan, the soul of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the souls of all the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.

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