

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – September 24, 2017
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Every few weeks, I go to Walgreens to pick up a prescription for my mom or myself. I think my car has a tracking device on it. It must automatically send out a text message to everyone in the area. Father Marshall is on his way to Walgreens – if you have a prescription to pick up, please rush over there and get in line in front of him. When I arrived last month, I was the eighth or ninth person in line. Not a problem, I thought. This line will move quickly, even though some of these people are picking up only one prescription and using the opportunity to purchase a year's worth of toothpaste and light bulbs and batteries and cough drops and vitamins. Of course, my optimism was short-lived. The first person in line was confused about his insurance coverage and it took a pharmacist and two assistants to try to explain things to him – eventually, they just took him to another window. The next person wanted to purchase an anti-histamine, which – thanks to its use in the making of meth – now takes more identification and signatures than does access to a Swiss bank account. The third person was relatively quick – until she decided to pay with exact change – down to the penny. The fourth person wrote a check – enough said. Eventually, my transaction took all of 30-45 seconds, but I had been waiting in line for 15 minutes. Of course, on those rare occasions when I am the first person in line and others are waiting behind me for them to track down my prescription or contact my doctor, I don't find myself complaining. Fairness, it seems, depends upon your place in line.

Jesus makes the same point in the parable included in our gospel passage today. Some people had been working the entire day in the hot sun. They had agreed upon the standard daily wage. As the day wore on, the landowner kept bringing more and more people to the vineyard. Eventually, when it came time to pay everyone, the ones who had worked only an hour got the full daily wage. Wow, those guys who arrived at dawn thought to themselves, he'll be paying us a fortune – and yet, when the time came, they too got the standard daily wage. That's not fair they cry out – I was here all day, and I got the same as those who worked only an hour. Yes, it was what we agreed to – but I should get more – or, by implication, at least, they should get less. Remember that they were not complaining that they were shortchanged, that the owner of the vineyard ran out of money and didn't pay them what he owed them – they were complaining because they got ONLY what was owed to them – while the landowner was generous to those who came late. They were not unjustly treated – they were envious of those who did less work. Fairness, it seems, depends upon your place in line.

Envy is not just something we feel when we wait impatiently in line at Walgreens. Envy is all around us these days. Modern advertizing is built upon the concept of envy – someone else has it – I have to have it too: the latest electronic gadget, the iPhone or iPad or iWatch or iKleenex or whatever is next. Never mind working hard to get it – never mind that I cannot afford it – someone else has it and I don't: that's not fair. The antidote for envy, I suggest, is gratitude. Rather than

focusing upon what we don't have, gratitude calls us to be grateful for what we do have. If our parable was taking place today, we might remind that first group of workers that many people these days are out of work. Rather than bemoaning the landowner's generosity to those who worked but an hour, they should be grateful to have a job at all. Rather than growing impatient with those who take up my time at Walgreens, I should have been grateful that our insurance coverage was simple, that the medications needed were covered, that I didn't need an anti-histamine and that I had a credit card to make payment easier. Maybe those ahead of me in line weren't quite so blessed. That 15 minutes I spent at Walgreens resentful, wondering if things could go any slower, I could have spent thanking God for his many blessings in my life.

That's why the Eucharist – the Church's great prayer of thanksgiving – is so important. Here, as we gather at the foot of the cross, at the entrance to the empty tomb, here all of the petty jealousies and feelings of dissatisfaction that run rampant in our lives should cease. We should be able to cast them aside as we gaze in awe of what is truly important. Ah, but that's not always the case, is it? Too often, we find ourselves distracted by what someone is wearing or how much they drop in the collection basket – not envious enough to increase our offering, I can tell you, but envious nonetheless. True, we're gathered here as Christ's body – but it is difficult to cast aside those feelings from the world around us, those inclinations toward envy, jealousy, sin. Here at Mass, and throughout our lives, we need to cultivate gratitude – to recognize the many and varied ways God has blessed us and to offer him our praise and our thanks for those blessings. Whatever difficulties we have in life, whatever frustrations we have in our job, at school, in the home – Jesus Christ is here, ready to enter our hearts and minds and souls once again. His Body and Blood are ready to nourish us. How great is that gift! How grateful must we be for his sacrifice! Beginning in October, we will have an increasing number of opportunities in our parish to express our gratitude to God for the gift of the Eucharist by participating in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on Sunday afternoons, on Thursday evenings, and on First Fridays. Drop in, spend some time in prayer before the Lord, and remember to give thanks.

It is this gratitude that we need to instill in ourselves – and most especially in our children. We need to awaken in ourselves – and ultimately, in our children – the wonder and awe of standing before our loving God. Last week, we gave thanks for the work of catechists – those women and men who have taken on the task of sharing the faith with our children and young people in our parish school and in our religious education classes. Today we remember that parents are the primary religious educators and that they teach their children both in words and in the example of their lives. If we demonstrate gratitude to our children, they will come to embrace it themselves. As our gospel today reflects, God is abundantly generous. May we share our gratitude for his generosity in the way we live our lives – and in the way we approach this altar of thanksgiving, this Eucharistic celebration.