

Sunday 25A. 20.9.26

God meets us in our need. There's a story of one of the Dukes of Norfolk wandering into the kitchen after dinner to be surprised by all these people busy at work in the midst of a mountain of washing up. So he asks one of the helpers "do you do this every day? At which point his wife has tracked him down and says: "Of course they do" – and drags him away before he can do any damage, ie to the way that life has been arranged for them, ie to the pot of wealth they sit on at the expense of the poor, ie the rest of society that supports them. I've extended the metaphor there with the present robber barons in mind such as Musk and Trump and so many more who are more obviously intent on ripping the world off and keeping their distance from the real world of others and their daily needs. In today's gospel parable we not only have God upsetting the normal order of things – paying the last first with the same amount but we have God as land owner visiting his people at first hand rather than the usual delegation of a bailiff or steward to do the work for him. God experiences his people's need directly. This is Christ as "God with us" – the whole point of the incarnation, of God meeting us in our need. And what is our need: to know we are loved equally, without distinction, but this very meeting stirs up in us the very sin that keeps us apart from God and one another. We want God to treat us specially vis-à-vis others. Remember this parable is spoken or being written down, at a time when the gentiles are being recognised as worthy of the Kingdom of God, of becoming part of a New Israel as well as circumcised Jews. A new People of God is being formed out of the old one and we don't have to look far to a present parallel in the issue of immigration: the world is on fire but we in the wealthy West (relatively speaking) find it difficult to let go of the wealth necessary to meet the daily needs of all. We were here first, after all, ignoring the inconvenient fact that this wealth was mostly accrued at the expense of others abroad, and still is, and that the world has always been a story of migration. We are touching on a very primal human instinct which God wishes to overturn for it's essentially a lack of faith in the God who meets us in our need, who made us and wants to meet that ultimate need we all have: to love and be loved in eternity and in entirety. It's a struggle St Benedict was acutely aware of in his Rule

*"In order to cut out this vice of private ownership at the very root everything necessary should be provided by the Abbot – cord, tunic, stockings, boots, belt, knife, pen, needle, handkerchief, writing tablet – so that all excuse of need may be removed. Still the Abbot must always keep in mind that saying in the Acts of the Apostles: "Distribution was made to each according as anyone had need (Acts 4). So let him*

*take into account the infirmities of the needy and not the ill-will*

*of the envious: in all his judgements let him think of the retribution*

*of God “.* (RB 55 The clothing and footwear of the Brethren)

“Retribution “ – that’s a hard word to make us realise the seriousness of our entrapment in ungodly ways of thinking. The landowner redistributes his wealth not according to our way of thinking – reward according to effort, but to his way of thinking – reward according to need, the daily need for each of those labourers to feed a family and give it shelter, the daily need a denarius just about meets for them all. It’s the act of a father, our father, who provides each of us with our daily bread and gives to each of us as we give to one another – it’s a redistribution of love according to need. When we know ourselves loved in this way there’s no need for complaint.

Just keep the Duke (ie God) out of the kitchen. Heaven knows what might happen if he finds out what really goes on.

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