

*Celebrating Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019...*

**Sunday, 6 October 2019**

**Go and Work in My Vineyard (2 Cor 2:12-17; Mt 20:1-16)**

Fr. Benny Joseph Mukalel CMI

Today Jesus tells us about the story of a landowner who wanted labourers to work in his vineyard. This story is told to show us something about Jesus and his wisdom. This story can be interpreted in the light of the basic duty that each baptized by her/his virtue of baptism has undertaken upon himself or herself, namely the spreading of the Kingdom of God which we call as mission work. The landowner is Jesus and the vineyard represents the Kingdom. Every baptized is the labourer.

The landowner goes to the market place in the morning to pick up labourers for his vineyard. The custom at that time was that the day-labourers usually supplied their tools. So, the landowner would pick up those labourers who are healthy, sturdy and who had apt tools for the work.

A missionary, therefore, must be fit and should be equipped if he/she plans to work in the vineyard of the Lord. She/he should be strong – spiritually - which means she/he has to undergone a Christ experience so that as St. Paul said in today's epistle, wherever the missionary goes shall spread the aroma of Christ, an aroma which comes from knowing God. Biblically, knowing is equal to loving. An aroma that stems from knowing and loving God that a missionary possesses after she/he has experienced and encountered the Lord is the apt tool that a missionary needs: the knowledge of God and the aroma that comes out of it.

The landowner picks up some labourers and agrees to pay them a denarius, the usual daily pay for a labourer. A few hours later the landowner goes to market place and sees others, still standing and waiting to be chosen. Here a couple of things are very evident. First of all, there are people to be hired though may not be as healthy, talented and efficient as the first group and secondly the vineyard requires more labourers. So, the landowner, being a true farmer, picks up the next best people and makes the contract to pay them. Here the landowner does not mention the exact amount that he would pay at the end but he says: "I will pay a fair wage." The landowner repeats this at noon and at three o'clock in the afternoon. This shows that there is plenty of work to be done in the vineyard and that the landowner wanted more labourers. So, he hires more people. Of course, as time goes by, the quality of the labourers deteriorates.

At around five o'clock, he goes out and finds out still people standing and waiting. He asks them why they waste the whole time. The answer that they gave is very relevant: "Because no one has hired us." This is because they are the rejected group by landowners. Perhaps they may be weak, scrawny or appeared ill-suited and unfit for work. But Jesus, the landowner, knows how to utilize them. There are different works in the vineyard, like pruning, weeding, tending, planting, watering, etc. So, it is not necessary that all the labourers be as healthy and sturdy as the first batch of labourers. But everybody should have the tool – the basic quality – in this case it is the experience of the Lord and the resulting aroma coming from knowing God. Even the last group

who appeared unfit can also be useful in the vineyard of the Lord. So, he told them: "You also go and work in my vineyard."

By selecting the labourers at five o'clock, Jesus has conveyed the message that in the Kingdom of God or in His vineyard all have works to do; and whatever may be the work one does, the landowner treats them all equal: therefore, he gave them all the same amount of remuneration. This is the principle of equity. Equity is not equality; there is a great difference between the two. The first group thought they would be getting more as they worked the whole day, but they were also given one denarius, equal to what was given to the last group who toiled only for one hour. In the eyes of the Lord, 'justice' is a bit different. The last group was the weak and the rejected group, the marginalized ones but God picked them and their one hour labour is equated with the labour of those who worked for the whole day. This is equity. It is like God valued equally the works of great missionaries like St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who toiled very hard through the slums, and St. Therese of Lisieux who has not visited any mission place but just prayed for the missionaries sitting in her cloistered convent. It is equal to what John Milton wrote as a conclusion to his sonnet 'On His Blindness': "They also serve who only stand and wait."

So, there is plenty of work to be done in the vineyard, the works are different and the Lord is inviting us to go and work in his vineyard. No matter what work we do, how silly the work is, everybody is treated equally and every work is placed equal in value. The work that a missionary does may be big or may be small, but to be a labourer in the vineyard he/she has to have one basic quality - the apt tool - the aroma of Christ that comes from knowing God. This is what the missionary is supposed to do - spread the aroma of Christ. In this way, the tool and the work are the same in the mission of the Church, namely, spreading the aroma of Christ that comes from knowing God.

*Published by*

CMI General Department of Evangelization and Pastoral Ministry