

Homily, 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time "A"
SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis
September 17 - 18, 2011
Rev. Noah J. Casey

We try to live our lives in an orderly fashion. We count on things going a certain way even more than we may realize. Recently, as you may know from the media, the Sherman-Minton bridge that brings Interstate 64 across the Ohio River from Indiana into Louisville, Kentucky was judged to be unsafe, and it was closed. The bridge carries a minimum of 80,000 vehicles a day back and forth across the bridge. The result is that those 80,000 vehicles have now been diverted further east to the Kennedy Bridge that up to this time has carried a load of over 150,000 vehicles. This whole situation has changed the lifestyles of thousands of persons each day, and will have broad ranging effects on jobs, safety, an already congested traffic pattern. We don't know what we have until we no longer have it. We like the usual order.

The usual order of Jesus' day for workers was that of the so called "day worker". The village well usually served as a place where employers could go and find workers for his farm, vineyard and other projects. This happened on a daily basis. Very few workers were what we called "salaried" workers.

Among the amazing features of today's Gospel story was the periodic return of the employer through the day all the way up to and including 5:00 PM! The text tells us they were hired for the "usual daily wage." Everyone of us listening to this story begins to calculate what all the workers will be paid based on the time of the call to work. It's natural for us to figure this out. We tend to operate off a daily schedule and clock. Morning, Noon and

Night are standard divisions of the day. Who comes first, who comes last? We put things in order to organize and prioritize of living. So, it is quite natural for us to want to pay the workers of the Gospel story accordingly.

But that is not how God works, and we are always invited to see as God sees, and do and God does. Our spiritual journey of conversion takes place over a lifetime, and in that time, bit by bit, we are invited and challenged to appropriate for ourselves God's vision and plan of action.

The emphasis in the Gospel is on the daily nature of God's care for us. The workers are paid on a daily basis. Each day we, as the workers in God's vineyard, are asked to trust in God's providential care. We rely on God to continue to invite us to be coworkers with Him in the ministry of the Church. Our most familiar prayer, the one taught to us by Jesus Himself, teaches us to pray for "our daily bread" knowing that each day we are to trust in God who gives us what we need if we trust in Him. We might not always receive what we want, nor in the measure we have sought out, but God does enfold us in His tender mercy. We pray for our "daily bread" so that we never become presumptuous and take for granted God's love. In turn we are asked to respond to our brothers and sisters, especially the poor, on a daily basis.

This daily act of trust is certainly revealed in God's compassion and forgiveness. No matter how long a person may have strayed from the practice of the faith, no matter how grievous our sinfulness, the Lord meets us, anticipates our return and seeks us out giving to us the justice promised to all no matter at what hour of life that person knocks at the door.

There are times when in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as I have mentioned to you before, that a person may show up who has been away from the Sacraments for a very long time. They come in anxiously

wondering if God's mercy will be large enough to cover their sins. God bestows on that person that same full measure of mercy that is given to the penitent who comes regularly. As I noted in last week's homily, God's gifts are freely given and without measure.

The question asked by the disciples is a question we all may ask at times: "What's in it for us?" What can we expect? We may have given up this or that, one thing or another, so in what manner will I be rewarded? In the Christian community, the desire to measure out, to calculate the cost and reward ratio is very prevalent. In the life of discipleship, we are asked to suspend our human forms of calculating, and to make our own that same generous attitude that comes to each of us from God. We might be tempted to think, "Hey, I've been faithful to this business my whole life, but here she comes and wants to the same benefit! It's not fair!" What is fair to us is completely blown out of the water by God's approach.

The categories of first and last are made by humans not God. I suppose we can say that when you are eternal like God, what's first and last just doesn't seem to matter. And how fortunate for us is this truth!

What we need to be focused on is what we heard from today in the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah: Seek the Lord while He may be found; call to Him while He is near. Don't wait. Seek God now, each day. Maybe we can make the words of the Psalm response our mantra for this week: The Lord is near to all who call on Him. If we focus on each moment, first and last doesn't matter so much.

It's going to take a very long time to fix the Sherman-Minton Bridge across the Ohio, but God is a bridge that is always open. Better to cross sooner than later, but cross for sure.

