

Cindy Bassett

The Bible Corner



Peace between brothers

Jacob contemplated the scene before him. Twenty years ago, he had fled from Canaan with nothing more than a walking stick in his possession. Today, a large family was camped here in the wilderness with many servants and a huge caravan of flocks. But how would his brother, Esau, receive him after all this time? At this moment, Esau's reaction was all that mattered to him.

"Father," a voice behind him called softly. "Judah, you should be asleep with the others," Jacob said, pretending to be stern. "We have a long trip ahead of us."

"I know, but I couldn't sleep," Judah replied.

"What's troubling you, son?"

"If Uncle Esau is your brother, then why are you so afraid to see him again?" Judah asked. "I could never be afraid of Reuben or Simeon or any of my brothers."

"Uncle Esau and I had a disagreement many years ago, and he might still be angry with me. But don't worry, Judah. God will see to it. Now off to bed with you," Jacob said, smiling.

The next morning, Jacob sent messengers to Edom where Esau was living to inform his brother of their arrival. Then he prayed, "Remember, O Lord, your promise to me at Bethel that I would inherit the land in Canaan and have descendants too numerous to count."

In a few days, the messengers returned with the news that Esau was coming to meet Jacob with an army of 400 men!

Jacob quickly divided his family and herds into two groups. If Esau attacked one group, the other group might have a chance to escape. Jacob sent the messengers to Esau again, but this time they brought several hundred of his best goats, camels and donkeys as a present for Esau.

After his family had camped for the night, Jacob went to a place alone to pray. Suddenly, a tall man came up from behind and wrestled Jacob to the ground. This wrestling match went on all night, and neither one of them was able to win. Finally, at dawn, the man said, "It will be morning soon, and I must go now."

"No," Jacob protested. "I will not allow you to leave until you bless me!"

"First tell me your name!"

"I am Jacob."

"From this time on, you will no longer be known as 'Jacob,' but as 'Israel,' meaning 'one who has been strong with God.' Don't worry about what man can do to you, for you have stood fast with the Lord!" And then the man turned to leave.

"Wait!" Jacob called, running after him.

"You haven't told me your name yet!"

"You must not ask," the man replied. "But here is your blessing." And then the man was gone and so was Jacob's fear of his brother.

That morning, just as Jacob prepared to leave with his family, his servants rushed up crying, "Your brother approaches with many others. We have seen them off in the distance."

"I am ready to meet Esau alone," Jacob announced calmly. "Leah and Rachel, take the children and wait here for me."

Everyone watched as Jacob went forward on foot. Even from this distance, he knew Esau immediately. Esau's eyes were fixed intently on him as he approached, but his face remained expressionless. "What does he think?" Jacob wondered. "Will he kill me in full view of my family?"

Jacob stood directly in front of Esau and he bowed humbly before him seven times. He stood his ground even after his brother jumped off his camel and bolted toward him. And Jacob knew at once that all bad feelings were forgotten as his brother embraced him warmly.

"I'm sorry that I waited so long," Jacob said. "That makes two foolish things that I have done."

"You are here now and that's all that matters," Esau said, smiling.

"How is everyone back home?" Jacob asked.

"Father cannot see at all now," Esau said pointedly, referring to Jacob's deceit. He paused, growing serious. "Mother died a few years ago." Then seeing Jacob's downcast look, Esau quickly added, "Who are all these people with you?"

"You have been an uncle many times," Jacob explained proudly as he gestured for his family to come forward. All of Jacob's children bowed to Esau as he greeted each one of them warmly.

Peace was finally established between Jacob and Esau after 20 years. Before Jacob returned to his father's house, he stopped at Bethel to worship and thank God for his safekeeping. At Bethel, the Lord said, "Go now to Canaan where I will cause you to become a great nation. You are no longer Jacob, but Israel!"

Israel settled in the land of Canaan with 12 sons. Their descendants became known as the 12 tribes of Israel, God's chosen people — Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph and Benjamin.

Scripture reference: Book of Genesis, chapters 32-35.

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



The privilege to serve

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 20:1-16; (R1) Isaiah 55:6-9; (R2) Philippians 1:20-24, 27.

Mark Twain once said, "God created man to the image and likeness of God, and ever since man has been trying to repay the compliment by creating God to the image and likeness of man."

One of the points of Our Lord's parables is to correct this tendency to whittle God down to our size. Sunday's Gospel is usually referred to as "The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard." That's the same old mistake that is made in referring to another parable as "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." Wrongly, we focus on the laborers and the son. Actually the focus should be on the owner of the vineyard and the father of the prodigal.

The point of Sunday's parable is "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways . . . As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts (R1)." We saw the truth of these words in last Sunday's Gospel — God's forgiveness is not at all like ours. This Sunday's parable confirms the same truth — God's generosity is not at all like ours.

The owner of the estate is compared to God. However, we easily shift our attention to the laborers. Apparently the need for workers was urgent. Perhaps the yield was larger than expected — a bumper crop. Or perhaps the rains were imminent. No matter, workers were needed, and five groups in all were hired.

Only the first group was hired "for the usual daily wage." The rest were promised "whatever is fair."

Our attention is focused on the first and the last groups. At sundown only these two are singled out. Those who had worked but an hour get a full day's wages. Our sympathies fall on the side of the first group — "they supposed they would get more." When this did not happen, one of them complained. And the owner answered, "Friend (here a term of reproach), I do you no injustice . . . I intend to give this man . . . the same pay as you."

Like an O. Henry short story, the parable has a surprise ending — the last got exactly what the first got. Probably Matthew was referring to a situation in the Church

of his day. Then Jewish Christians, the first to be called, and Gentile Christians, the last to be called, were both given the same gift — grace, the good news of salvation.

However, that is not the point of the parable. The point is that God is generous, extremely so; whereas man, in ugly contrast, tends to be envious, begrudging the master's generosity.

First of all, nothing makes one so like Satan as envy. A woman won the state lottery. She said she wished she hadn't. Her mailbox couldn't hold the begging letters from "worthy" causes and persons. To Ann Landers, she wrote, "The thing that bothers me most is that not one of those contacting me rejoices in my luck; in fact they all have a sense of resentment — that they deserve the money as much as I . . ."

Begrudging badgers us all. We begrudge those who make more money than we do, those who live in better houses, those who are better looking, those with more talent, those more popular, and so on. La Rochefoucauld wrote, "Few are able to suppress in themselves a secret satisfaction at the misfortune of their friends." Begrudging has no place in the life of a child of God. "Weep with those who weep," wrote Paul, but "rejoice with those who rejoice."

Secondly, we must remember that in the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, the call is to work in the vineyard of the Lord. The labor referred to, therefore, is service for the Lord. Now to be called by the Lord, to work for the Lord, is a privilege, not a burden, not a drudgery. It is greater to be able to work a long while for the Lord than a short while.

Latecomers do not laugh at those who had worked all day. They do not say, "Ha, Ha! We got the same wages you got, for less work!" Oh no! Rather, they lament the late call, like Augustine. "Too late have I known Thee, O Truth ever ancient! Too late have I found Thee, O Beauty never fading!" The latecomers regret the wasted hours and days and years.

How blessed, therefore, are all those called to work in God's vineyard at the beginning of life — those baptized as infants into the Catholic Church. Their role is one of thanksgiving and praise, and of a mission to call others into the vineyard of the Church, no matter how late the hour.

Cenacle sisters to celebrate foundress' feast day next week

Three days of celebration have been planned by the Cenacle sisters in honor of the feast day of their foundress, St. Therese Coudere.

The festivities will take place from September 25 through 27, at the Cenacle Center, 693 East Ave., Rochester.

The annual feast holds special significance for the order since it is both the feast of their patron saint and also the 102nd anniversary of her death.

Feastday celebrations will begin with a candlelight vesper service starting at 8 p.m. on Friday, September 25. Refreshments will also be served.

The actual feast day itself will begin with a concelebrated Mass at 1:30 p.m. Father Thomas Mull of Sacred Heart Cathedral will be

the principal celebrant, and will be accompanied by Fathers Benedict Ehmman of Holy Apostles Church and Joseph Trovato of St. John Fisher College. The Thomas Donohue Chapel Choir will sing the Mass in honor of the feastday. Tea will be served in the main parlor immediately following the Mass.

Feast day celebrations draw to a close with an ecumenical open house at the Cenacle from 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday, September 27. A slide presentation of the Cenacle's history and present ministries will also be shown.

There will be no charge for the weekend's activities, but offerings would be appreciated. The celebration is open to the public.

Contact Sister Margaret Mayk, r.c., at (716) 271-8755 for information.



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