

A Generous Life

25th Week in Ordinary Time – Matthew 20:1-16a

Noon recess at Penn Elementary School in North Liberty, IA was one big baseball game. Boys and girls from every grade were allowed to play. Milo, the school janitor, always pitched. He was a tall barrel-chested man of German descent, who wore the customary, gray uniform. Attached under his chin every day of the year was a perfectly placed bowtie. He kept the school as neat and clean as his impeccably pressed uniform. But at recess, Milo became the face and presence of a generous life.

Milo let everyone play the game. The rules were the same whether you were a girl or a boy, talented or not so coordinated. You played “workup” and everyone got to bat. Children learned each position on the field because Milo had you cover every spot. These were the days when girls wore dresses (never pants) and boys were considered the true athletes. Many children did not have money for baseball gloves. Surprisingly, gloves were always abundant when Milo pitched the game. If you came late or had a bad day, Milo didn’t care. He was there for everyone. If a child was learning to hit the ball and needed more than three strikes, you could bet that Milo’s patience and skill resulted in that child finally making contact with the ball. If anyone started the chant or complain of “not fair”, Milo stopped the game and gently reminded all of us that this was “baseball”, and everyone was welcome. He always saw the glass half full and he treated every child as if he or she was truly a gift.

We fell in love with the game. We fell in love with the man because we recognized, even as children, that his generous heart and kindness were helping us grow in ways we did not understand at the time. Milo’s game was a lesson on living a generous life.

In today’s gospel, Jesus tells the story of God’s mercy, love and generosity. **“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard.”** He hires the first workers **“for the usual daily wage.”** Throughout the day the same landowner hires workers at different times with the promise of payment. At the day’s end those who came last are paid first with the same amount agreed upon for the full day’s work. Assuming they’d get more, the workers who have toiled in the fields all day are disgruntled by the reality that they will receive the same as everyone else. The landowner (who represents God) says, **“Are you envious because I am generous?”**

The lesson here is that God’s ways are not our ways. God is not keeping score. God is inviting us continually into “the game”. God is always seeking those who are lost, marginalized, and disassociated with the main stream of society. God is saying that everyone is welcome. Yes, even those who don’t come to Mass every week, those who might not live a lifestyle that seems appropriate. For God, the “playing field” is equal. Everyone is called to recognize God’s blessings and abundance in their lives. We are all called, by our baptism in Christ, to live a generous life, sharing the abundance gifted to each of us according to God.

Blessings!


Sue Schettler