

The ethics of forgiveness in the light of migration

Reading of Matthew 20: 1 - 16

Brothers and sisters,

What we've just heard in the Gospel of Matthew is an insight in the spiritual life that Jesus calls 'the Kingdom of God'. The announcement of the Kingdom of God contains an ethic of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the instrument to overcome envy and greed. The Gospel points towards greed as the most devastating human tendency that holds back a just and fair society. In the long run greed holds back the Kingdom of God.

Therefore Jesus tells his disciples the parable of the landowner and the workers. This parable fits in the bigger picture of the Gospel of Matthew. His teachings are a groundbreaking effort to portray a new way of living and thinking. He shows us the Messiah Jesus as the fulfilment of Moses, by telling his disciples that every law that Moses gave them, comes down to a guidance or signpost to realise a renewed life. In that new life there is no more greed, war, envy or conflict. In the Sermon on the Mount, that is the blueprint of the Kingdom of God, Jesus calls his disciples to start and live this new life now. He says: it starts within yourselves by becoming 'of one piece', 'tammim' in Hebrew, perfect, but not in a sense of infallibility but by acknowledging personal fallibility in order to overcome it.

To act and proclaim this message of the Gospel today, we have what we call a 'hermeneutic problem'. This means that the words no longer cover the essence of the message and that the message itself has lost its recruiting force. Money, as in the parable, and the dream of wealth is the only force that makes people move. There is nothing wrong with that, according to Jesus, the problem arises when people get greedy and don't want others to prosper.

The crux of the hermeneutic problem is freedom. The landowner says to the complaining workers of the first hour: is your eye envious because I'm generous? In other words: I'm free to give whatever I want to whoever I want. Right? I'm fair because I give to you what we agreed, one denarius for the day.

The heart of an ethics of forgiveness is freedom, not only as being free from chains, but freedom of mindbinding tendencies. The most important chain that binds the human mind is fear, fear for scarcity or austerity, fear for the other and in the end fear for death.

Fear is like snow that vanishes in the light of justice. You're free to be just – at one piece – and when you use that freedom, fear disappears. In the light of the big European context of today it is necessary to let the light of the Gospel shine, first in yourself, then in your environment and the community where you live in. It is necessary that the bigger framework is committed to small communities where forgiveness and solidarity overcome fear. Numerous small communities that carry the light of oneness can walk together on the path that leads to a free and just world.

I think that we all know that it is a long walk, with a lot of obstacles, but again the bigger picture of Jesus' proclaiming of the Kingdom of God, must give us patience and perseverance for working in the vineyard. The fact that the landowner brings in more co-workers fills us with joy, because it shows us the human consciousness that makes people move tends towards freedom and dignity. That must convince us to let our belief carry on where reality fails. Remember, says Jesus, the last will be first and otherwise.

Thank you for your attention.