

Homily for the 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in OT A (September 18, 2011)

Sacred Heart

Salisbury, NC

Rev. Fr. Benjamin A. Roberts

*The Lord is near to all who call upon him.*

Today the prophet Isaiah invites us to seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near. We are invited to seek the Lord who is generous in forgiving and full of mercy. From the prophet Isaiah, we hear that we are the ones who are called to seek.

In the Gospel today the Lord Jesus tells us the parable of the landowner who seeks laborers for his vineyard. Here it is not the servants who are called to seek, but the master who is seeking for them. The master never gives up his search for laborers for his vineyard. He called them in the early hours of the morning to go into the vineyard and promises them the usual daily wage. He called them in the middle of the morning, and promises them a just wage. He called them in the middle of the day, in the middle of the afternoon, and even in the last hour of the working day. Each laborer was given the same command, "Go into my vineyard," and each laborer was promised a just payment. And when the day of work was ended, the laborers who were the last ones to be hired were the first

ones to be paid. Those who worked in the vineyard for only an hour were paid the usual daily wage. The payment that they received was far greater than the work that they had accomplished. Each laborer in turn received the usual daily wage until all had been paid. Those who had worked the full day were paid as had been agreed, but they resented the generosity of the master in paying all the workers equally. Essentially, my brothers and sisters, those who had agreed for the usual daily wage, who were paid the usual daily wage, and labored the whole day in the vineyard of the landowner, missed the point.

The apostle Paul, however, did not miss the point. A devout son of the people of Israel, a student of the law, Paul was a man who had sought the Lord while he may be found. Formerly he had been a persecutor of the followers of Jesus, but after encountering Jesus on the road and hearing his call, Paul's life was forever changed. The last apostle to be called directly by the Lord Jesus tells us today in the letter to the Philippians that "life is Christ." We hear that the reward at the end of this life, when the day of work is over, is to be *with Christ*. Paul understood what the laborers in the vineyard did not. The reward was

not the payment. The reward was the relationship with the master.

From the early hours of the morning, they had been privileged to serve in the vineyard of the master. He had called them unto himself and sent them to do his work. They forgot the joy of a life spent in the service of the Lord. They even missed that at the end of the day, the master called one of them, "My friend." The apostle Paul never forgot that joy. Paul never forgot that Jesus had called him, as he called all the apostles, his friend. Through trials and tribulations, persecutions and imprisonments, Paul never forgot that the life of greatest joy and the life of greatest meaning is the life spent in the vineyard of the Lord.

We may have come here today to seek the Lord where he has promised to be found. In the scriptures proclaimed, in the gathered community of the baptized, in the one though unworthy set apart as his priest, and most especially in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood, the Lord Jesus has promised to be found. We may have come here today because at whatever hour of our lives we are currently in, and that is known to God alone, we have heard the call of the Lord and have gone into the

vineyard. Let us labor in the vineyard of the Lord, in whatever way he has called us and at whatever time he has called us.

As we celebrate the Eucharist today, let us be attentive to the call of the Lord to labor in his vineyard. Let us remember that Jesus Christ himself is the reward of our labors in his name. And let us today be thankful, for our Lord is near, our Lord is very near, to all who call upon him and he has called us his friends.