

Twenty-fifth Sunday *per annum*
Year A, 2026

Is 55:6-9 Phil 1:20c-24, 27a
Ps 145 Mt 20:1-16a

Generosity: conducting ourselves in manner worthy of the gospel

In our second reading, from the first chapter of St Paul's letter to the Christians in the Greek city of Phillippi, the Apostle leaves us with an exhortation that we do well to heed: "*conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.*"

"*The gospel of Christ,*" St Paul says. Does by that he mean the good news that is Christ himself or does he mean the things that Christ taught and did? The expression, "*the gospel of Christ,*" could mean either of these things: Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of Jesus himself, who is the holiness of God made flesh. Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of all that the Lord taught as he spoke to you the words of everlasting life.

Whether we understand "the gospel" as referring to the good message about Jesus or the good message that is Jesus himself, Paul exhorts us act in such a manner as to be worthy of the goodness and truth of that message. Our conduct then must be fitting, becoming, appropriate, deserving, coherent with what we profess to believe about Christ and the gospel. Our lives and our actions must be equal to the faith we profess, to what we say we believe about Jesus and about the Way of life and holiness he sets before us (Acts 9:2). In a word, we are meant, as disciples, to imitate our

Master. The more we imitate him, the more we become like him, the more we decrease and he increases (Jn 3:30).

Throughout the gospels, Jesus is constantly inviting those who would be his disciples to come after him and follow him. *"Follow me."* These words spoken by Jesus are something of a refrain occurring across all four gospels. Follow me. Imitate me. Think like me. Have my mind and my heart. Be my hands and my feet. Speak my words. Think my thoughts. Follow in my ways. Leave behind your thoughts and your ways. Forsake all that you call yours and follow me. I will give you all that is mine; *"a hundred times more"* than you gave up *"and ... eternal life"* (Mt 19:29). Just follow me. Or in the words of Paul: *"conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ."*

This is the *general* principle, then, of the Christian life: to follow Christ and to imitate him in all things. This is how we live in a manner worthy of the gospel. But today's scriptures point us to a more *specific* consideration of how we might conduct ourselves in light of the gospel and so imitate Christ Jesus.

Consider what we heard in our first reading and in the gospel and what these two scripture passages reveal to us about God. From Isaiah the prophet, we are told to *"turn to the Lord for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving."* And in the gospel, the Lord Jesus gives us a parable that teaches what the kingdom of heaven is like. It is like a landowner who is *"generous"* with his wealth, bestowing it freely on those who least deserve it. Generosity, then, in one way

in which we can and must follow Christ and imitate him. By living the spirit of generosity, we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel.

What does it mean to be generous? What do we mean by this word today when we use it? Typically, we understand generosity to mean a willingness to give, especially of our wealth, to others who are in some kind of need or who could benefit in some way from our beneficence. In addition to being generous with our treasure, we can also be generous with our time and with our talents, using them in service of others. The generous person does not hoard or withhold; he gives freely and willingly and even gladly. The generous person does not need to be asked in order for her to notice the need and to be moved to answer the need from her own resources.

Generous. A word that comes to us from Latin through French, meaning “of noble birth.” Generosity is a characteristic of nobility. Nobility of character, nobility of heart, nobility of soul. Those who are noble-born, if they are to be truly noble, must conduct themselves in a manner worthy of that nobility. And generosity is the hallmark virtue of nobility.

There is a French expression that is sometimes used in English – *noblesse oblige* – nobility obligates. The sense of that expression is this: those who are of high social rank or status, those who have power, position, wealth, prestige – all of which are associated with nobility – have a duty to act not in their own interest, but in the

interest of others, especially those who have less, who are less fortunate. They are honor- and duty-bound to act with decency, with kindness, with generosity. Otherwise they become unworthy, dishonorable, contemptible, vile. The very opposite of noble: ignoble.

Here at St Patrick's, in the seven years that I've been here as your pastor, I have often noticed and remarked on the pattern of generosity that exists among you. When Fr Silas Bogati came to us a couple of weeks ago to speak about the Catholic Church in Nepal and the difficulties that that small, but faithful group of Nepali Catholics face on a daily basis, you responded with generosity. This little parish donated \$10,000 on that weekend to the help of Church in Nepal, which is literally on the other side of the world!

Listen to how St Paul, at the end of his letter to the Philippians (4:15-18), praises them for their generosity. I think St Patricians can rightly see something of the Philippians in themselves.

You Philippians indeed know that at the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, not a single church shared with me in an account of giving and receiving, except you alone. For even when I was at Thessalonica you sent me something for my needs, not only once but more than once. It is not that I am eager for the gift; rather, I am eager for the profit that accrues to your account. I have received full payment and I abound. I am very well supplied because of what I received from you ... "a fragrant aroma," an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

And what about St Patrick's generosity to the needs of the Church locally and to local efforts at outreach and evangelization? Taking the annual Bishop's Services Appeal, St Patrick's, nearly every year for the past ten years or so, reaches upwards of 300% of its asked-for goal. This year, our goal is \$23,000. So far as of August 31, sixty-one individual donors from St Patrick's have contributed \$57,500, roughly 250% of our goal, and there are still three months to go!

Once a parish reaches its goal, half of all monies donated to the BSA in excess of a parish's goal are returned to that parish as a rebate, to be used for whatever purpose the pastor sees fit. Last year, our rebate was around \$17,000. This year, it will be about the same, if not more. I have decided to honor your generosity to the BSA by earmarking these funds to be used for the needy and the poor, so that our parish – through our parishioners – can contribute generously in support of local entities and efforts that respond to local needs, just as the BSA does.

From my point of view, the only thing that I would wish for is for more people to participate in giving to the BSA. Sixty-one individual donors from St Patrick's! Why not 71 or 81 or 91? I tell you like St Paul told the Philippians in the passage I just quoted for you: *"It is not that I am eager for the gift; rather, I am eager for the profit that accrues to your account."* If you haven't given to the BSA yet, even if you have only \$5 to give, please pick up a BSA brochure – they're at every door – and they have all the information you need to express your generosity.

I'd like to share with you another easy way that you can, through generosity, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. If you are an LUS or SLEMCO customer, there's a little box on your monthly utilities bill called either "Share the Light" or "Lights On." If you check the box, you add one dollar to your bill to help those who need assistance with utilities. One hundred percent of those contributions are administered by Catholic Charities of Acadiana on behalf LUS and SLEMCO. Any LUS or SLEMCO customer in need anywhere in the entire Diocese of Lafayette, not just Catholics, can approach Catholic Charities for help with their utilities bill. Each month, all available funds are completely used. I really want the word to get out among Catholics to check these boxes to add that one little dollar, which, accumulated among thousands and thousands of households, adds up to a lot of help for a lot of people in need. This is easy and simple generosity.

As I said earlier, we think of generosity primarily in terms of treasure. But one can also be generous with one's time and with one's talents, applying them where needed, often by volunteering in our churches, in our schools, in various civic organizations and relief efforts in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Generosity, then, however it is expressed, is connected with a certain nobility of mind and heart and action. As the scriptures speak to us about generosity, they mean to reveal to us something about God, whose generosity we are then meant to imitate.

And so in closing, I want to return to the prophet Isaiah, who in our first reading exhorts sinners and the wicked to forsake their ways and turn to the Lord. Why? Because God is “*generous in forgiving,*” and mercy can be found with him. God pardons abundantly and freely, willingly and with pleasure, if only we seek him with sincerity and “*call upon him in truth.*” The responsorial psalm then ratifies and praises this revelation of how God is generous with mercy: “*The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. The LORD is good to all and compassionate toward all his works.*” And as we read in another psalm, “*with the LORD is mercy and fullness of redemption*” (Ps 130:8).

God demonstrates his holiness, his perfection, and his compassion by being generous with mercy and forgiveness. In this, God’s goodness is on full display, “*for the praise of his glory*” (Eph 1:6, 12, 14), a glory revealed to us in the person of Christ Jesus, who is the holiness, perfection, and compassion of God made flesh. As faithful disciples, we strive to imitate the Master, whose generosity with mercy is a hallmark of his goodness and his power. So, let us then be holy as God is holy (Lev 19:2); perfect as God is perfect (Mt 5:48); merciful, as God is merciful (Lk 6:36). In a word, let us, who, made children of God have been raised to the great nobility of mind, heart, and soul by the Spirit of God, demonstrate our generosity however we can, and, led by the Spirit of God, so live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ, whose are the kingdom, the power, and the glory, now and forever. Amen.