

God's Generosity

Isaiah 55:6-9
Psalm 145
Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a
Matthew 20:1-16a

Who? What? Where? When? Why? The “Five Ws” is a research technique that is used in professions such as journalism and police investigations.¹ It entails the basics of gathering information with the hope of better comprehending a particular thing. I thought it might be helpful to use this technique to better comprehend today’s Scripture readings. So, let’s begin at the beginning!

Who?

Who are the Scriptures talking about this weekend?² The answer is *God*. The first half of our first reading today from the Prophet Isaiah is in the third person and is referring to the important characteristics of God. The second half of the first reading switches to “first person,” in which God further describes His characteristics. In the Gospel reading, Jesus told a parable about a landowner, who is meant to be an image for God, which helps us to better understand Him.

What?

What are the readings about? Our readings are about God’s *generosity*. In the first reading, we heard that God “is generous” (Isaiah 55:7b) and in the Gospel, the landowner, an image for God, asked, “Are you envious because I am generous?” (Matthew 20:15b). While “generosity” is not one of the theological attributes of God, it is part of His nature. Saint Paul expressed this in his letter to the Galatians, writing, “The fruit of the Spirit [of God] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness...” (Galatians 5:22). The Holy Spirit evokes and brings about these gifts in us precisely because they are the very nature of God. In other words, the more deeply we accept God into our lives, the more clearly we will reflect His Presence, which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, [and] faithfulness.”

Where?

Where do we find God’s generosity? We find God’s generosity manifested in forgiveness and love. In our first reading today, the prophet Isaiah explained that, “God... is generous in forgiving” (Isaiah 55:7b). We find a similar message in the Book of Psalms—“Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness; in your *abundant* compassion blot out my offense” (Psalm 51:3) and “Answer me, Lord, in your *generous* love; in your *great* mercy turn to me” (Psalm 69:17, *emphasis mine*).

¹ Also referred to as the “Five Ws and one H (how?), or the Six Ws.

² Looking specifically at the first reading and Gospel, which always carry the same theme.

Many preachers and televangelists today mistakenly preach that God's generosity entails an abundance of *health and wealth*. This is commonly known as the "prosperity Gospel," but, in fact, it has nothing to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through Christ's teaching and example, He demonstrated very clearly that becoming materially rich, successful, powerful, or remaining in perfect health is not a priority of God. Nowhere in the Gospels do we hear about Jesus making people materially wealthy; instead, He taught lessons such as, "Blessed are you who are poor" (Luke 6:20). Also, it is clear in the Gospels that the primary point of the physical healings that Jesus performed was to get people to listen to His message, not to suggest that physical health is an ultimate value in life.

When?

When do we experience God's generosity? We experience God's generous forgiveness and love when we *least expect it*, which can either frustrate us or pleasantly surprise us! Let's be honest—our prayers are often more about instructing God about what *we* want Him to be doing rather than humbling listening and learning what *He* is doing. This leaves us frustrated and angry with God. As we mature in our faith journey, we begin to let go of our expectations and eagerly look for God's generosity in the unexpected places. We finally take God at His Word when He says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8). The more we accept this truth, the more we find ourselves pleasantly surprised by God's generosity.

Why?

Why is God generous? There are two answers to this question. First, God is generous because of who He is, not because of what we've done. In Saint Paul's letter to Titus, we read, "When the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit..." (Titus 3:4-5). This is *unearned* generosity, which is the point of the parable in today's Gospel reading. The workers who had labored the whole day were angry about the landowner's generosity and complained, "These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat" (Matthew 20:12). God's generosity is not intended to stir up envy or anger in us, but rather, to fill us with humility and gratitude, which, in turn, leads us to be generous with others.

Why is God generous? The second answer is that God is generous because it leads us to be generous. Saint Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, explained this very succinctly, writing, "You are being enriched in every way for all generosity, which through us produces thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:11).

This week, let's be aware of the "who, what, where, when, and why" of God's generous forgiveness and love, and, may it inspire us to be generous!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:

- ✦ In the Book of Genesis, we read about two brothers, Esau and Jacob, sons of Isaac and grandsons of Abraham, and rift between them. In chapter thirty-three, there is a generous reconciliation. Read Genesis 33:8-11, and reflect on what God might desire to teach you through the generous exchange and reconciliation between the brothers, Esau and Jacob.