

Homily for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2011

Recently I read of the discovery by scientists of a star that appears to be made of diamond. The whole dead ancient star is a big diamond. They come to this conclusion because of its chemical composition and density. However, it is 50 light years from us. It has been given the name "Lucy" after the Beatles song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds". It is bit far to be of any use to us!

During my holidays as I sat on the beach on a glorious Queensland Spring morning I could not help but think that we do not have to go 50 light years away to find a jewel of a planet. It is right here before us. It is a jewel even though there is much evil and tragedy around us. Here we are, so insignificant before the enormity and wonder of the universe, trying to make sense of it. Some would say, precisely because of that vast difference between us who, since Copernicus no longer see ourselves at the centre of the universe, believe that there cannot be a God. It seems absurd to believe in such a being. We are but the product of chance made from star dust.

While we can come to faith simply by the wonder of the beauty and utter mysteriousness of the universe it takes a bit of a mystical imagination to do so. It takes a bit of a jump for us who want immediate rational knowledge and satisfaction. Jesus' parable about the landowner and the labourers provides the kind of jolt that is needed.

The story is intentionally provocative. The land owner makes the first employed wait till last to be paid the daily wage. They, and we who listen, are set up by Jesus to see the land owner give those who had worked the shortest time in the coolest part of the day get the same amount as those who worked all day in the heat. The unfairness of it hits us and we react. We are often told that life is not fair. We see it all around us. We experience it ourselves. And our reaction is often to be resentful and angry and hit out at those who seem to us unfairly given an advantage.

Think of the resentment we feel about those who receive social security payments but have never worked much at all in their life. And there are many we regard as free-loaders. Then there are we Catholics who have tried to be faithful over many years only to see someone else make a death bed conversion. Or we can be hurt that our children can seem so ungrateful for all our sacrifices on their behalf. And we see others who apparently have little faith if any at all lead happy and fulfilling lives. There is plenty of material for resentment.

The parable wants us to try and think very differently about life and God. It does take a little mystical imagination to do so. As Isaiah has God say today, "Yes, the heavens are as high above earth as my ways are above your ways, my thoughts above your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). Fifty light years is hardly enough distance to describe the distance between the way we think and the way God thinks.

The generosity of the landowner to the labourers who worked little jolts us into a different way of thinking about God. We cannot understand such an action if we think only in terms of fairness in industrial relations. When we are able to immerse ourselves in the wonder of the world and people around us we can begin to see anew that God's love is not a reward for being good, or for doing our duty, or for labouring faithfully for a life time. Those things certainly are important. But that is not why God loves us. God loves us because God is love and God bestows it on both good and bad alike. We find it hard to see such extravagant love given to those we do not believe are worthy of it.

Scientists have given to our imaginations a massive diamond star to ponder. The never ending discovery of the immensity and mystery of the universe to me is simply a manifestation of the infinite overflowing generosity of God to us insignificant creatures who are part of this wonder. It gives each person, animal and rock, a significance beyond what our small minds can hold. From this flows all our morality about the value of human life at every moment of our existence, all our ethics about the environment in which we live and are, and even about the politics we follow. Or as Pope Benedict put it, the world needs an ethical ecology which embraces every aspect of our lives and our world.

One can become weary with the debates in the media about the irrelevance of Christianity and religion in general in our secular society. Arguing about the good and evil of religion often comes to no conclusion and no one changes their minds. Jesus offers us a mind changing and heart changing view of God who is unlike any other god. People have often said that all gods are a human invention. Certainly many are. But no one in his right mind would invent a God like the one who is revealed to us in the Scriptures and in the life of Jesus. This God just does not think or behave like we do or like we think God should. God will always confound us. God's thoughts are far beyond us but God is very close to us.

Nikos Kazantzakis, the famous Greek writer who wrote the novel *Zorba the Greek*, tells a story of an elderly monk he once met on Mount Athos. Kazantzakis, still young and full of curiosity, was questioning this monk and asked him: "Do you still wrestle with the devil?" "No," replied the old monk, "I used to, when I was younger, but now I've grown old and tired and the devil has grown old and tired with me." "So," Kazantzakis said, "your life is easy then? No more big struggles." "Oh, no!" replied the old man, "now it's worse. Now I wrestle with God!" "You wrestle with God," replied Kazantzakis, rather surprised, "and you hope to win?" "No," said the old monk, "I wrestle with God and I hope to lose!"

Fr Graham