



25th Sunday of Ordinary Time – A
September 20, 2020
Matthew 20:1-16

Background on the Gospel:

This parable is often called the “laborers in the vineyard” but it is better to call it “the generous landowner.” The spotlight should be on the landowner and his largesse of spirit rather than on the question of financial reimbursement. The

parable is not about money or “sweat equity” but about grace. When we study the parable from the “ground level” of the workers getting paid the same amount (even though they had worked varying lengths of time), the parable will inevitably leave us puzzled and even angry. Consider the perspective of the landowner: the crops needed picked as soon as possible and the owner was more than happy to pay a whole day’s wage to any available worker. The owner was not discriminating between people. God is free to offer His gifts to whomever He wishes. Our role is to be good receivers of whatever blessings we are given or not given. Comparisons are not helpful!

It is likely that this parable originally was intended to address the resentment that “good” observant Jews felt toward Jesus who was forgiving and accepting of tax collectors and public sinners who did not keep the Law. Jesus was trying to say that God understands the challenges of each person and adjusts His mercy accordingly. We should not be comparing or be jealous. If we are doing religious work, it should be for God’s glory and not to “earn” extra merit or distinction.

There are many things in the parable that are interesting to note. For instance, the owner does more work than anyone else: he goes out five times to hire workers and send them back to his farm. That is symbolic: ultimately, God does more work than we ever do! Everything we are and have is a gift from God, even our ability to work. Secondly, notice the rhythm of it: the master calls and sends people to his farm: literally, this “call/sending” is about vocation! We should be grateful that we have been called and sent.

In speaking to the disgruntled employee, the master calls him “my friend.” The master was trying to invite the disgruntled person to have a different viewpoint, to see things in terms of gift/grace rather than in terms of what is deserved or merited. No one can earn grace! But we can lose it!

Note also the “agreement” regarding the daily wage: the word here is the Greek for “symphony”, a blending of voices and sounds. God’s “music” has a beautiful flow to it but sometimes we can be the disgruntled workers who don’t want to hear the music of God. As the first reading today reminds us, God’s ways and our ways are not always the same.

Thoughts for prayer and reflection:

- 1) The major question that this parable seems to ask us to consider is this: can I accept the goodness and generosity of God toward every other person or do I think of myself as more deserving than others because of what I have done for God or for the Church etc. Am I an envious person?

- 2) Consider the symbol of the denarius, the daily wage. The denarius was one coin and could not be “subdivided”; either you got the whole payment or you didn’t. So in this sense the denarius represents God’s love which is whole and entire. It cannot be rationed. God’s love is to be accepted in its totality. We cannot decide to accept only aspects of it. God gives one same love toward all people.

- 3) Am I perhaps a “workaholic” expecting to be noticed and praised for everything I do? Do I think of salvation as something that is a reward for good behavior or do I understand it as a gift of God; something I could never possibly merit or deserve?