



SUNDAY GOSPEL

The vineyard labourers

MATTHEW 20:1-16

Jesus said to his disciples: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day, and sent them to his vineyard.

Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage." So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing round, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" "Because no one has hired us" they answered. He said to them,



Painting of the parable by Jacob Willemszoon de Wet (mid 17th century.)

"You go into my vineyard too." In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first."

So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner. "The men who came last" they said "have done only one hour, and

you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat."

He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last-comer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?" Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.' ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Mr Sean Donovan

Chairperson – Macarthur Social Justice Network



Put yourself in today's Gospel. You go to the market hopeful of getting hired. A landowner comes and picks you from the crowd to get some work for a day: money to feed your family. You are happy to have a job and arrive at the

vineyard determined to impress the landowner so he will hire you again tomorrow.

Through the day you see other workers arrive. This is not unusual. The harvest has to be made while the fruit is ripe, so more hands are required to get it done. In the last minutes, some new people arrive.

How do you feel when these latecomers are paid before you? What do you think as they are paid the amount you were promised, after

picking just a few grapes? Are you outraged when you don't get more? Has your joy at getting some work become sour grapes? Do we measure worth with money?

Jesus sees a different viewpoint. Each worker has a family to feed. The landowner is generous. We often fall into envious ways, comparing our "rewards" to other people. I "earned" it, they didn't "deserve" it. Jesus says there is another way. Can we be generous like God? ■

A WORD FROM POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT XVI



In today's Gospel, Jesus recounts the parable of the owner of the vineyard who at different hours of the day hires labourers to work in

it. And in the evening he gives them all the same wages, one denarius, provoking protests from those who began work early. That denarius clearly represents eternal life, a gift that God reserves for all. Indeed those who are considered the "last", if they accept, become the "first", whereas the "first" can risk becoming the "last". The first message of this parable is inherent in the very fact that the landowner does not tolerate, as it were, unemployment: he wants everyone to be employed in his vineyard. Actually, being called is already the first reward: to be able to work in the Lord's vineyard, to put oneself at his service, to collaborate

in his work, is in itself a priceless recompense that repays every effort. Yet only those who love the Lord and his Kingdom understand this: those who instead work only for the pay will never realize the value of this inestimable treasure.

It is St Matthew who recounts this parable, an apostle and an evangelist, I like to emphasize that Matthew lived this experience in the first person (cf. Mt 9: 9). Indeed, before Jesus called him he worked as a tax collector and was therefore seen as a public sinner, excluded from "the Lord's vineyard". But everything changed when Jesus passed by his table, looked at him and said to him: "Follow me". Matthew rose and followed him. From a publican he immediately became a disciple of Christ. From being "last" he found himself "first", thanks to God's logic, which - for our good fortune! - is

different from the logic of the world. "My thoughts are not your thoughts", the Lord says, speaking through the mouth of Isaiah, "neither are your ways my ways" (Is 55: 8).

St Paul also experienced the joy of feeling called by the Lord to work in his vineyard. And what a lot of work he accomplished! Yet, as he himself confessed, it was God's grace which worked in him, that grace which from persecutor of the Church transformed him into an Apostle to the Gentiles, to the point of saying: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" However he immediately added: "If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell" (Phil 1: 21-22). Paul clearly understood that working for the Lord is already a reward on this earth. ■

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TALKING POINTS

1. How do you respond to Sean Donovan's question of 'how would you feel when these latecomers are paid before you'? What if you find yourself a latecomer, a bit like St Matthew, who wrote this account of the parable?
2. God's generosity is often described as scandalous because no one truly gets what they deserve! Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI reminds us that being called is the first reward and how just working in the vineyard is priceless reward for those who love the Lord and his Kingdom. So, do we bring the attitude of a wage earner or a shareholder in a growing family company to what God asks of us?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for Each Other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Response: *Lord, teach us to your ways that we may be joyful recipients and givers of generous justice and mercy.*

Reflect: Are we guilty of the human desire for God to treat us with mercy, but to treat others with justice? How in my life am I participating in the labour of the vineyard, and looking for opportunities to share my story of God's generous love in my life?

Closing Prayer: To know your love and ways is our reward O Lord. Draw us by your grace into generous service for your purpose, to labour willingly as adopted daughters and sons of the Father, sisters and brothers of Jesus, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen..