

GOSPEL

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, "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.'

REFLECTION BY POPE BENEDICT XVI

21 September 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

You may remember that when I addressed the crowd in St Peter's Square on the day of my election it came naturally to me to introduce myself as a labourer in the vineyard of the Lord. Well, in today's Gospel (cf. Mt 20: 1-16), Jesus recounted the very same 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, whose liturgical feast day we are celebrating on this very day. 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, for whom we are celebrating a special Jubilee Year, 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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The Virgin Mary, whom I had the joy of venerating in Lourdes a week ago, is the perfect branch of the Lord's vine. In her germinated the blessed fruit of divine love: Jesus, our Saviour. May she help us to respond constantly and joyously to the Lord's call and to find our happiness in toiling for the Kingdom of Heaven.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Pope Benedict XVI says that being called into the Lord's vineyard is already a reward. How does that change the way we think about discipleship, service, and vocation?



Heart: Do you ever find yourself comparing your efforts, sacrifices, or faithfulness with others? What does this parable reveal about God's generosity — and your own heart?



Hands: Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that working for the Kingdom is itself a gift. How can you respond more joyfully to the place God has called you to serve right now, rather than wishing for a different one?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.