

SPIRITUALITY

Reflecting on the Gospel

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. Acts 16:14b

R7. Alleluia, alleluia.
Open our hearts, O Lord,
to listen to the words of your Son.
R7. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Matt 20:1-16a; L133A

Jesus told his disciples this parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard.

After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

Going out about nine o'clock, the landowner saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.’

So they went off.

And he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise.

Going out about five o'clock, the landowner found others standing around, and said to them,

‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’

They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’

He said to them, ‘You too go into my vineyard.’

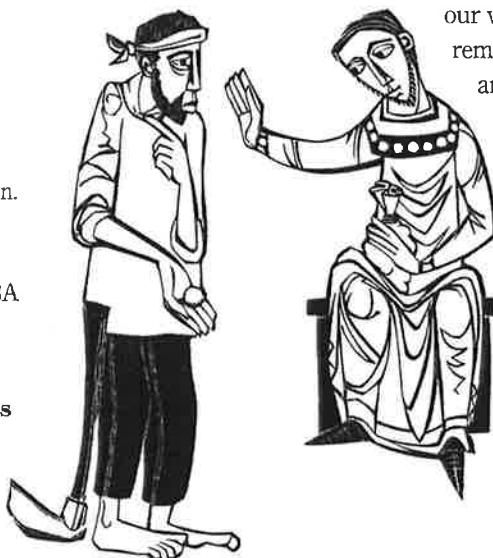
When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman,

‘Summon the laborers and give them their pay,

beginning with the last and ending with the first.’

When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage.

So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage.



We can't buy our way into the kingdom of heaven—we must work our way into it! The “work” we must do is active waiting while we remain open to God's call, and responding generously whenever and wherever that call comes. In this Sunday's gospel a most generous landowner is sensitive to the plight of others as he hires day laborers for his vineyard. Presumably at dawn when he went out to hire laborers, he would have hired what he thought he needed for the day. But he goes out four other times of the day, and hires laborers because they were “standing idle.” In God's kingdom there is no cause for idleness, no limit on “wages,” and no reason to regard waiting as an unproductive effort.

The workers, like the landowner, are persistent. Instead of giving up and going home, they remain in the marketplace seemingly “standing idle.” Actually their idleness was not simply doing nothing—theirs was an active waiting; these workers persistently remain ready and willing to work. Of such is the “kingdom of heaven.” The “kingdom of heaven” consists of those who persist in awaiting God's recurring call, and who respond willingly no matter what hour the call comes. The last are first not because of the number of hours they work, but because of their openness to God's call no matter when it comes and their faithful response. The “kingdom of heaven” subsists in persistent openness, active waiting, and faithful response. The laborer's wage is beyond monetary expectation—it is salvation.

In this gospel parable the landowner's behavior is remarkable in two ways: his care for idle workers not able to put their skills and energy to good use, and his manner of paying wages. His behavior describes aptly the kingdom of heaven: God calls each of us to use whatever our gifts are to advance the growth of the kingdom; God “pays” us not in dollars and cents, but with the free gift of salvation which is immeasurable, unlimited, endless, and overflowing. Yes, in God's kingdom there is no cause for idleness, no limit on “wages,” and no reason to regard waiting as an unproductive effort.

We might think that the gospel landowner is just to those he called first and generous to those he called last. In fact, our gracious and saving Landowner-God is both just and generous to all the laborers simply because the divine “wages” are always a free gift, undeserved, and more than we can earn or expect. God's “wages” are a share in divine Life.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Most of us think of work as a necessity: we need a paycheck to pay the bills, procure the necessities, and maybe have a little left over for some entertainment. This parable invites us to think of work in a different way: by our labors we are building up God's kingdom, spreading God's reign in our world, “earning” our salvation. God calls us to be laborers in the divine vineyard—a call we first answer at baptism and then continually answer throughout our lives each time we say yes to the divine call, reach out to others in imitation of God's goodness and generosity, and cooperate with all God asks of us. This divine, saving “work” is a privilege—we actually share in God's saving deeds! God uses us to bring salvation to the world. This work has a great dignity about it. This work is a privilege. This work is a lifelong response to God's invitation to be God's laborers.

Continued in Appendix A, p. 298.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: kingdom of heaven is like, landowner, hire laborers, standing idle, So they went, usual daily wage, I am generous

To the point: The workers, like the landowner, are persistent. Instead of giving up and going home, they remain in the marketplace seemingly “standing idle.” Actually their idleness was not simply doing nothing—theirs was an active waiting; these workers persistently remain ready and willing to work. Of such is the “kingdom of heaven.” The “kingdom of heaven” consists of those who persist in awaiting God’s recurring call, and who respond willingly no matter what hour the call comes. The laborers’ wage is beyond monetary expectation—it is salvation.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: The first reading challenges us to expand our thoughts and ways to the limitless reach of God’s manner of dealing with us. The gospel makes this specific by showing us a God who is merciful and generous in calling everyone to salvation.

to experience: We tend to be very impatient with waiting for anyone or anything. We deem it a waste of time, a waste of opportunity, a waste of energy. Yet, sometimes it is only through patient waiting that we come to new insight, that a complex situation resolves itself, that life-giving relationships grow.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Like a parent sitting at a child’s bedside ready to respond to the slightest cry, God is ever near, **answering** our every need (psalm refrain). Once we recognize that God is giving us all that we need, we no longer find ourselves grumbling about what God is giving to others (gospel). Instead we rejoice that everyone’s needs are being met and bless the One who is “just in all his ways” (psalm). We turn away from rivalries with one another to celebrate the limitless expanse of God’s care and generosity. Then the “ways” and “thoughts” of God that are far above us (first reading) can find a place very near, in our own hearts. May this be what we call upon God to give us (refrain).

to psalmist preparation: “The LORD is near to all . . . who call upon him in truth” (psalm). What truth about God are this psalm and these readings inviting you to ponder? What truth about yourself? How during this week might you call upon God to show you this truth more clearly?

**Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time,
September 24, 2017**

Gospel (cont.)
Matt 20:1-16a; L133A

And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying,
 ‘These last ones worked only one hour,
 and you have made them equal to us,
 who bore the day’s burden and the heat.’
 He said to one of them in reply,
 ‘My friend, I am not cheating you.
 Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?
 Take what is yours and go.
 What if I wish to give this last one the same as you?
 Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money?
 Are you envious because I am generous?’
 Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

**ASSEMBLY &
FAITH-SHARING GROUPS**

- I stand idle and accomplish nothing when . . . I wait patiently for God’s call and accomplish . . .
- The work God calls me to do for the kingdom is . . .
- The gifts I have to offer for the growth of the kingdom are . . . I am generous in sharing these gifts when . . .

PRESIDERS

My way of living my ordained ministry calls laborers to God’s vineyard no matter what “time of the day” when I . . .

DEACONS

My ministry takes me to the “marketplace” and I find . . .

HOSPITALITY MINISTERS

My ministry mediates God’s call to the assembling church and . . .

MUSIC MINISTERS

The “wages” I receive for my participation in music ministry are . . .

ALTAR MINISTERS

My serving ministry includes a great deal of active waiting that brings me to . . .

LECTORS

I have learned that God’s ways and thoughts are high above mine (see first reading) in that . . . This is sometimes pleasing and sometimes difficult for me because . . .

**EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS
OF HOLY COMMUNION**

My manner of distributing Holy Communion witnesses to God’s unbounded generosity of “wages” toward all in that . . .