

**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.’

**A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS**

In today’s Gospel reading there is the parable of the day labourers in the vineyard, which Jesus recounts in order to explain two aspects of the Kingdom of God: the first is that God wants to call everyone to work for his Kingdom; the second is that, in the end, he wants to give everyone the same reward, that is, salvation, eternal life.

The owner of the vineyard who represents God, goes out at dawn and hires a group of workers, agreeing with them on the day’s wages. It was a fair wage. Then he goes out again [several times] later in the day — he goes out five times on that day — until the late afternoon to hire other unemployed labourers whom he sees. At the end of the day, the landowner orders that a denarius be paid to everyone, even to those who had only worked for a few hours. Naturally, the labourers who were hired first complain because they see that they are paid as much as those who worked for fewer hours. The landowner however, reminds them about what had been agreed; if he then wants to be generous with the others, they should not be envious.

In reality, this “injustice” of the owner serves to provoke in those listening to the parable a qualitative leap because here Jesus does not want to speak about the issue of work or of a fair wage, but about the Kingdom of God! And this is the message: there are no unemployed people in the Kingdom of God. Everyone is called to do their part; and there will be a reward from divine justice for everyone in the end — not from human [justice], luckily! —, but the salvation that Jesus Christ acquired for us with his death and Resurrection, a salvation which is not deserved, but donated — salvation is free — thus, “the last will be the first and the first last”.

With this parable, Jesus wants to open our hearts to the logic of the Father’s love which is free and generous. It is about allowing oneself to be astonished and fascinated by the “thoughts” and the “ways” of God which, as the Prophet Isaiah recalls, are not our thoughts and not our ways (cf Is 55:8). Human thoughts are often marked by selfishness and personal advantages, and our narrow and contorted paths are not comparable to the wide and straight streets of the Lord. He uses mercy — do not forget this: He uses mercy —, he forgives broadly, is filled with generosity and kindness which he pours forth on each of us. He opens for everyone the boundless territory of his love and his grace, which alone can give the human heart the fullness of joy.

Jesus wants to make us contemplate the gaze of that landowner: the gaze with which he looks upon each of the labourers searching for work and calls them to go to his vineyard. It is a gaze which is filled with attention, kindness. It is a gaze which calls, invites one to get up and begin a journey because he wants life for each of us; he wants a full, committed life, safe from emptiness and inertia. God excludes no one and wants each of us to achieve his or her fullness. This is the love of our God, of our God who is Father.

May Mary Most Holy help us welcome into our lives the logic of love which frees us from the presumption of deserving God’s reward and from the critical judgement of others.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- What is your reaction to what the landowner does in this gospel? What are the motivations that underpin this reaction?
- Who are the ones we often leave out of work or activity because we don’t believe they have anything to offer?
- The Kingdom of God is both expansive and inclusive – how does this make you feel?

**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 (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to 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 reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.