

**The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard  
(25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)**

**Isaiah 55:6-9—God’s Thoughts are Not Our Thoughts**

1. God’s “Thoughts” ≠ Human Thoughts
2. God’s “Ways” ≠ Human Ways

**Psalms 145—the Lord is Near to All Who Call Upon Him**

1. The Lord is “gracious” and “merciful” (v. 8)
2. The Lord is “slow to anger” and “abounding in steadfast love” (v. 9)
3. “The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made” (v. 10)

**Phil 1:20-24, 27—To Live is Christ, to Die is Gain**

1. “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (1:21)
2. “My desire is to depart and be with Christ” (1:23)

**Matthew 20:1-16—The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard**

1. Context of the Parable: wealthy vineyard owner vs. day-laborers
2. The Hiring of the Day Laborers:
  - a. Early in the Morning (=6:00am): 1 Denarius (standard day’s wage)
  - b. 3<sup>rd</sup> Hour (= 9:00am) = he sees others “standing idle in the marketplace”
  - c. 6<sup>th</sup> Hour (=12:00pm)
  - d. 9<sup>th</sup> Hour (=3:00pm)
  - e. 11<sup>th</sup> Hour (=5:00pm): “Why do you stand here idle all day?”
3. Evening: “Call the laborers and pay them their wages” (probably 6:00pm)
  - a. The last: 5pm workers → receive 1 Denarius
  - b. The first: 6am workers → receive “the same”
4. Result: the Laborers Complain
  - a. The last worked “one hour!” (5:00-6:00pm!)
  - b. The first worked 12 hours in the “burden of the day and the scorching heat”
5. Response of the Owner:
  - a. Justice: “Did you not agree with me for a denarius?”
  - b. Mercy: “Do you begrudge my generosity?”
6. Message: “*So the last will be first, and the first last*”

**St. Augustine on the Reward of Eternal Life**

“In that great reward then, we shall all be equal—the first to the last and the last to the first. *For the denarius stands for eternal life, in which all will have the same share. Although through diversity of merit some will shine more brilliantly than others, in the possession of eternal life there will be equality.* What is endless for all will not be longer for one and shorter for another. What has no bounds will have none either for you or for me. Those who lived chastely in the married state will have one kind of splendor; virgins

will have another. The reward for good works will differ from the crown of martyrdom; but where eternal life is concerned there can be no question of more or less for anyone. Whatever may be the individual's degree of glory, each one will live in it eternally. This is the meaning of the denarius. (Augustine, *Sermon* 87, 1.5-6; trans. E. Barneclutt)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. When God says that his “thoughts” are not like our “thoughts,” and his “ways” are not like our “ways,” what does that mean? Why did the Church choose this passage for the first reading for this week?

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2. Put yourself in the place of the day laborers who worked from 6:00am to 6:00pm and received the same as those who worked for only one hour. How would you feel?

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3. When Jesus says the “first” will be “last” and the “last” will be “first,” what does this mean spiritually? Is it just for God to be so merciful?

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### For Further Study

1. Edith Barneclutt, *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels Year A*. New York: New City Press, 1992, pp. 126-27. An excerpt from Augustine's homily and explanation of this parable.
2. Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri. *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 252-56. Excellent explanation of the workers in the vineyard.