25th Sunday in ordinary time

GOD'S STANDARD IS RADICAL GENEROSITY, NOT HUMAN FAIRNESS

The Gospel features the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) and the profound reminder from prophet Isaiah that God's ways are far above our own. (1s 55:8-11)

The Lord presents us with the important message that His lavish generosity towards us. God is ever ready to gift all of us with the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ no matter the cost (Jn 3:16). This is a cause of great joy for us as God's children. The prophet Isaiah had earlier set the tone by reminding us that as the heavens are high above the earth so are God's ways and thoughts different from ours (Is 55:9).

In the parable, a group of laborers sat in the market hoping that someone will hire them for the day. Then the landowner appears and picked some for a deal (say $200). They became excited. We can easily imagine their reaction; oh, today is my lucky day. I was among the lucky pick from the crowd! All is well, they thought. They were happy for being among the chosen and favored group.

But the land owner kept going out at every interval of three hours bringing new sets of lucky picks from the crowd. At the end of the day. All got the same wage.

The scenario suddenly changed after the pay checks were received. The same workers who were happy and excited in the morning are now grumbling. This is terrible, they complained. We have been cheated. So, what changed one might wonder? What changed is this: Someone got a better deal.

Beloved sisters and brothers we have here a lesson for our spiritual journey of faith: if we spend our lives and energy looking over our shoulders, measuring our lives over what others have that we don't have, burying ourselves in the world of unhealthy competitions and rivalry, then we will always come out short.

So, the parable is not about market prices or just wages of labor. No, it is about God's generous gift of salvation and an invitation for us to imitate this divine attribute. God chose the raw deal for himself. He came to die in our place. In 2 Cor 8:9 St Paul reminds us that Christ became poor that you may share God's riches.

So, gratitude wakens the awareness of God's presence in our lives even in moments of adversity. God is admonishing us from becoming angry when He blesses those around us according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

The readings hence invite us to contemplate divine generosity as against human accounting system. We learn from the Gospel today that God's Math is Different. God is teaching us a new divine math.

In the first reading (Isaiah 55:6–9), God declares, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways". We often operate on a ledger system of strict merit—getting exactly what we feel

we "earned.". The workers thought that landowner was unfair. In Matthew's Gospel, the landowner pays the workers who labored for one hour the exact same daily wage (a denarius) as those who baked in the sun all day (12 hours). To us, this looks like injustice. But Jesus' message is that God's Grace is a Gift, not a wage earned or merited: The landowner asks a piercing question: "Are you envious because I am generous?" (Matt 20:15). God's kingdom does not run on corporate employment standards. It runs on the constant and consistent overflowing of divine mercy (Ps 86:5, Ps 130:7).

Again, Jesus invites us to be open in generosity and accepting God's gifts in others to grow our parish community. The late-shift workers stood idle simply because "no one has hired them". God is always seeking out those who feel overlooked, abandoned, or late to faith, offering them full dignity and the gift of salvation. Jesus calls us to move beyond envy in our lives. Our frustration usually stems from comparing our blessings to someone else's. Instead of grumbling that God is too good to others, we are called to rejoice in His overflowing compassion.

God's justice is radical generosity and boundless mercy. His ledger system is not the human account of fairness. His invitation to the kingdom and new life in the Spirit is ever open (Matt. 11:28-30, 2 Pt 3:13-15). The kingdom's gift is never merited nor earned but God's gift of eternal life. The Gospel further invites us to refrain from being unnecessarily judgmental. St Paul reminds us that it is the will of God that all people come to knowledge of Him and so be saved (2 Tm. 2:4). The good news is that it is never too late to return back to God (Hos. 6:1-3, Is. 1:18). God never gets tired of forgiving our sins when we repent of them.

The parable further challenges the "elder brother" syndrome in many of us (Lk 15:25-32). The Gospel invites us to examine if we harbor spiritual envy when God shows mercy to people whom we are not comfortable with. It demands us to shift from saying "Why do they get the same reward?" to rejoicing that the Vineyard Master is generous enough to save everyone.

In the context of parish restructuring, this parable invites a real openness to each and every one of us to the reality of the new Pentecost. For lifelong parishioners who have poured decades of sweat and financial support into a specific church building, watching boundaries shift and new communities merge can feel unfair. Yet this is where the spirit is leading the Church.

Jesus reminds all of us that the "Vineyard" belongs entirely to the Master, not to the laborers. Thus, we are called to keep working hard in the Lord's vineyard by being active witnesses of the Gospel. This entails welcoming whoever seeks to join our parish community, rather than grumbling about how the Master dispenses his bountiful blessings.

Ultimately, the parable invites us as people of faith to move from a mindset of scarcity and transaction to one of abundance and gratitude, recognizing that **everyone is an eleventh-hour worker in the eyes of a completely generous God**.

In addition, God's grace and salvation are unconditional gifts, not rewards we earn based on our own merit or length of service.

Jesus told this parable to challenge the transactional mindset of His disciples, particularly Peter. Just before this passage (in Matthew 19:27), Peter asks, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

Jesus uses the story of the landowner paying the late-day workers the same wage as those who worked all day to teach two core lessons:

1) To rebuke spiritual pride: The workers hired first felt they deserved more. Jesus warns that those who view their relationship with God as a business contract will end up resentful of God's generosity to others.
2) To redefine justice through grace: Human justice demands equal pay for equal work. Divine justice, however, is rooted in radical generosity, ensuring that everyone receives what they need to survive, regardless of when they entered the vineyard.

We live in a culture that heavily emphasizes meritocracy—the belief that your worth is tied directly to your productivity, net worth, and hard work. This parable directly disrupts the "grind culture" mentality. It reminds us that relationship with God cannot be optimized, earned, or bought. Your spiritual worth is not a reflection of your achievements or your status.

Further still, the Church in our time continues to see a mix of generational "cradle" Catholics and a growing wave of adult converts or "reverts" entering through the OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation for Adults). Sometimes, lifelong churchgoers can unconsciously resent the sudden enthusiasm or leadership of newcomers. Hence, the parable of the landowner warns lifelong Catholics not to be envious of God’s favor toward those who come to the faith late in life. A "late" conversion is celebrated just as much as a lifetime of service.

Our Lord Jesus reminds us of the need to keep trusting in divine Providence amidst economic anxiety. This increases our trust in the never-failing God (Matt 6:25-33). With lingering inflation worries, shifting job markets due to AI, and financial instability which ultimately creates a scarcity mindset. It is easy to view life as a zero-sum game where someone else's gain is your loss.

Jesus invites us to move from a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance, trusting that God’s grace is infinite and never runs out.

Let us pray for the grace of renewal and divine grace. Let us pray for a complete change of heart to realize that God’s generosity is radical generosity and boundless mercy. We pray for the grace to bear witness to this divine generosity by being really generous is supporting our parish projects and weekly sacrifices for the growth of the parish. May the words of St Catherine Sienna be our watchword for this new week: “Be who God meant you to be and you will set the whole world on fire”. Amen.

Peace be with you.