

September 18, 2011



The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY

Isaiah 55:6–9;
Philippians 1:20–24, 27;
Matthew 20:1–16

MONDAY

Luke 8:16–18
“... pay attention to how you listen ...”

TUESDAY

Luke 8:19–21
“... my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

WEDNESDAY*

Matthew 9:9–13
“Those who are well have no need of a physician ...”

THURSDAY

Luke 9:7–9
“... who is this about whom I hear such things?”

FRIDAY

Luke 9:18–22
“... who do you say that I am?”

SATURDAY

Luke 9:43b–45
“Let these words sink into your ears.”

*Feast of Saint Matthew

Are you envious because I am generous?

“The Laborers in the Vineyard” is a somewhat unsettling parable that seems to reflect common human expectations, then and now. The message was as hard for the original community as it is for us today.

The landowner agreed to pay “the usual daily wage” to the first group of laborers he hired. To the others hired later in the day, he simply said, “I will pay you whatever is right.” What is the “right” or just wage for someone who has merely worked one hour?

The workers who labored all day felt cheated, as many of us probably would today, in the face of what seemed like an outrageous injustice. Yet, the parable ends with a poignant question, “Are you envious because I am generous?”

There had been no injustice against those who worked all day, but an unbelievable amount of generosity was

given to those who arrived late. The resentment of the first group was caused by envy.

This parable may have been teaching the equality of all the disciples is the reward of eternal life. It doesn’t matter who was called first or who served longest; everyone wins.

This parable could also have been addressed to those who criticized Jesus for welcoming sinners and tax collectors. With God as the landowner as revealed in Jesus, the parable could have been used to explain why Jesus preached the kingdom to both the religious and the lost sheep. No matter which group it is, if they accept his preaching, they will be granted an equal share in God’s Kingdom. Isn’t God generous?



The Faith of the Church

Parables were characteristic of Jesus’ style of teaching. The Laborers in the Vineyard teach about the sin of envy—sadness or anger at the sight of another’s goods. Envy reflects hatred, joy at the misfortune of a neighbor, and displeasure at his prosperity. It represents a refusal of charity and is often rooted in pride; the baptized person should strive to live in humility (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 546, 2539–2540).



Questions of the Week

Some Christians cannot accept that we do not need to work hard to “earn” God’s love. God’s love is unconditional. If we really believe this, we will not mind inviting late arrivals to that same intimacy.

Adults

Have I ever complained because God was generous to others who in my opinion did not deserve it?

Children

Do I get upset when one of my friends gets something that I think I deserve?

Responding to God's Word . . .

This week's Gospel reading may be one of the most misunderstood parables. When the landowner agreed to pay the first workers the usual daily wage, they expected a denarius. Those hired later in the day expected some proportionate fraction of a denarius. Today, we understand very well the details of this transaction.

The unexpected happened when the latecomers received a full day's pay. The other tired workers then *assumed* that they were going to get more. Surprisingly, they all received the same pay. In today's culture, disgruntled workers would sue the company for

breaking labor laws and denounce the owner as unfair. This parable demands a response. It is impossible to read it and remain indifferent! The nature of our response reveals the kind of person we are. Do we rejoice with the good fortune of others? Or do we resent and complain because others are getting more?

We must realize that the owner has done nothing unjust. Nothing was taken from the early workers in order to give to the others. Can we see this and accept and even praise the generosity of the owner, that is to say, the generosity of God?



Meditation Moment

The purpose of Jesus' story in The Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:15) isn't to illustrate an unfair action by an unfair owner. The opposite is true. It's to illustrate God's generosity. The punch line of the story is the farmer's question: "Are you jealous because I am generous?" The farmer knew that if he paid the later workers only for the time that they actually worked, they wouldn't have enough to buy food for their hungry families. So he gave them a full day's wage.

For reflection . . .

Do I tend to have tunnel vision and see only my world and no one else's?

THE WORLD ASKS, HOW MUCH DOES HE GIVE? CHRIST ASKS, WHY DOES HE GIVE?

JOHN RALEIGH MOTT

ADAPTED FROM *VISION* BY MARK LINK, SJ

Listen to the Poor

Happy are those
who consider the poor;

The LORD delivers them in the
day of trouble. The LORD protects
them and keeps them alive; they
are called happy in the land. You do
not give them up to the will of their
enemies. The LORD sustains them on
their sickbed; in their illness you
heal all their infirmities.

Happy are those who
consider the poor! Amen.

Psalm 41:1-3

*Carry this thought in your heart as a
guide for your faith journey this week.*

"Prayer is the best weapon we
have; it is the key to God's heart.
You must speak to Jesus not
only with your lips, but with
your heart. In fact on certain
occasions you should only speak
to Him with your heart."

Saint Pio of Pietrelcina

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. Take some time this week to engage your family in a dialogue about this parable. Ask everyone how they REALLY feel about the generosity of the landlord.

In the workplace or in school. Act generously toward someone you barely know. See how they respond.

In the community. Identify a needy family in your neighborhood and offer to help even if you do not think they "deserve" it.

Profile in Faith

Saint Pio of Pietrelcina

(1887-1968) was a Capuchin priest famous for his stigmata. Yet his gifts had more to do with his wisdom as confessor and his love for the sick and suffering. Each day he heard confessions and blessed the sick. Many claimed that he knew details of their lives that they had never mentioned.

Feast Day: September 23

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