

## 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Do you agree we live in an unfair world? It's strange how quickly children are aware that life is not fair. Just listen into what children have to say and it's not long before the words "It's not fair!" can be heard. Someone has more sweets or a bigger present than another, having to go to bed earlier than their older siblings, their turn to wash up. Or especially if they can't do something they want to do and of course "everybody else can!" Can we hear ourselves sometimes - saying to God, friends, ourselves and anyone else prepared to listen "It's not fair!" And do you know, you are probably right! It isn't. Ask Jesus – He knows.

He lived a perfect life, harmed no-one, healed countless, fed the hungry, preached good news to the poor, performed marvellous miracles - yet He was falsely arrested, on trumped up charges, and one gets the feeling the verdict had already been agreed before the evidence had even been put together. Yet He was innocent of any wrongdoing. Life seemed most unfair.

I expect many Christians raise question the fairness after hearing the parable that is the focus of our meditation today. That the vineyard owner paid the workers who clocked in at different times the same wages sounds like an insult to intelligence—wholly unjust, unfair. But is it really? Perhaps it is unjust and unfair according to the human scale that values people in terms of productivity, not as persons worthy of respect. No business manager would ever operate this way with their employees; neither would any workers union be satisfied with what transpired. But God operates at a different level. For God says, as we heard in the first reading from the book of Isaiah: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord."

So, how do we understand this justice of God that triumphs over our pettiness and envy? Let us look at this parable this way: You need workers for your farm. You go out to Home Hardware looking for labourers. Sure enough, there are a bunch of men and women standing by, looking for a day's work. Whom do you pick? The younger, the sturdier, the healthier. The older, the weaker, the sickly, and the handicapped are often left behind.

But they also need a job. They also have others to feed. But no one picks them, and they stand there for hours. But the owner of the vineyard in Jesus' parable would still pick them. Even if it is for one hour, he offers them the dignity of labour. When pay time comes, they must be paid first, for, being weaker and older, they might need more time to walk home. And they are paid a day's wage. Whether it was their fault or not that they were not picked early, they also have a family to care for, mouths to feed. The younger, the sturdier, the healthier, can wait a bit longer. And of course, they are paid as was

## 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

promised. The owner acts justly to the earlier labourers; and he acts with mercy, going beyond justice, to the later ones.

**The parable speaks of the mercy of God that does not negate justice, but elevates it.** St. Paul invites us today to “conduct ourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.” This alone is the way worthy of the gospel of Christ: to delight in the blessings of others and do as the owner of the vineyard did, completing justice with mercy in our dealings with fellow children of God.

God’s generous favours to others will never deprive us of what is rightfully ours. And if I feel troubled by God’s generosity towards others, perhaps I have a long way to go in growing into the image and likeness of God. So today, we shall pray for a generous heart that is worthy of the gospel of Christ.