

Homily of Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, 2026

Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18; Philippians 1:20-24, 27; Matthew 20:1-16

In the first reading, Prophet Isaiah tells us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor his ways our ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts. Meaning, (1) Human beings plans are limited based on what they can see right now and what they imagine will happen. But God sees the whole picture into eternity. (2) Therefore, instead of demanding that God fit into human wisdom, standards, and expectations, we are invited to surrender our own limited viewpoints to God and trust in him. St. Paul says, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God" (1 Corinthians 3:19).

The parable in today's gospel goes against the wisdom of this world. In the parable, the same wage is paid to those who worked all day, those who worked for a few hours, and those who worked for only one hour. Judging from human wisdom, standards, and expectations, the landowner acted unfairly.

However, Jesus did not tell this parable to teach employers how to pay workers. With this parable, Jesus taught the lawyers, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the chief priests that although the Gentiles received the message of salvation later than the Jews, the Gentiles would have equal share in the Kingdom of God. Salvation and heaven are not classed. Before and during the era of Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders and legal experts exhibited a strong sense of entitlement.

In our time, there are places where some people, due to their entitlement mentality, deny others their rights and privileges. There are places where some people, due to their entitlement mentality, render others as nobodies. St. Paul tells us in the second reading, "Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). The way of the gospel of Christ is as St. Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Jesus prays for us in John 17:21, "I pray that they may be one...."

The message today stands against preferential treatments and exclusiveness entrenched in our structures. Sadly, these vices rear their ugly heads in families, organizations, communities, churches, society, and so on. Where do we not find the vices of preferential treatments and exclusiveness? The only solution is to conduct ourselves, as St. Paul challenges us, in the way of the gospel of Christ. We pray the prayer of Jesus, that we may be one.

The parable in today's gospel is one of the biblical explanations why the Catholic Church performs the Last Rite (the Sacrament of Extreme Unction) on those in danger of death or the dying in the hope of the individuals' repentance and God's forgiveness of their sins and be welcomed into his kingdom. The dying thief crucified by the side of Jesus received forgiveness just before his death and was welcomed into paradise (Luke 23:43).

Jesus concludes his instruction in today's gospel with the following words, "The last will be the first, and the first will be the last." This reminds me of a boxing tournament where the boxer who had only 50 points knocked out his opponent who had 150 points within the last twenty seconds of the fight. There are many instances like this. The unemployed men who stood at the marketplace did not walk away in discouragement. They remained until 5pm! Their perseverance, patience, waiting, and hope paid off!

Many times, we are tempted or actually fall into the temptation of writing off others or writing ourselves off. We ask dismissive questions, just like Nathaniel in John 1:46, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" We forget that Mary Magdalene became St. Mary Magdalene, and that Saul became St. Paul. And a host of other 'lasts' that became 'firsts.' We forget the words of Scripture in 1 Samuel 2:5, "She who was barren has borne seven children..." Therefore, do not rush to conclude, to dismiss, and to write off. Something greatest eventually came out of Nazareth!

Therefore, be patient. Persevere. Keep hoping. Keep trying. Keep praying. Do not give up. Do not walk away in discouragement or despair. Many blessings had occurred in the nick of time. Your 11th hour blessing may be on its way! Amen.

(Note: 5pm is the 11th hour because ancient Roman and Jewish timekeeping counted 12 hours of daylight from sunrise to sunset. Sunrise is 6am, which is hour 1. Sunset is 6pm, which is hour 12).

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