25th Sunday in O.T.

Sept. 20

We hear a story from Jesus that tends to bother everyone: the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Parables communicate truth, but also cause us to think. We are meant to hear our own voices in the complaint of these workers. Dealing with God, we sometimes think things are unfair. Why does He do what He does?

A point to reflect upon, St. John of the Cross' statement: **We are not meant to fall in love with the benefits of God, but to fall in love with God Himself.** Not the rewards God might give us, but with His will.

In the beginning of our spiritual walk, God will use consolations to draw us close to himself. Inevitably God will take away those benefits so we fall in love with God and not his benefits.

When we hear in the Gospel the landowner state, are you jealous because I am generous? We can think of those who have lived their faith all their life complaining about the person who did not have a conversion until their deathbed. (Example – In the Movie Scarlet and the Black, the Nazi leader, Colonel Kapler eventually had a conversion and was baptized in jail by Monsignor O'Flaherty, the same priest he had persecuted).

The workers who began at the start of the day compared to those at the end of the day, we don't know their background or circumstances. God gives people what they need at the moment they need it, He has a perspective that we do not have.

The first reading reminds us that God's thoughts can be hard for us to grasp. Jesus' mercy and compassion challenge our usual notions of what is fair from a human perspective.

First reading emphasizes the distance between God's perspective and ours.

Isiah 55 is not primary about the intelligibility of divine actions. In examining the context, we see that the discourse concerns God's mercy toward the undeserving. Our reading follows on the passing which promises a future in which the poor, hungry, and thirsty will come to a divinely-provided banquet.

The relationship of the meal imagery to the Davidic covenant concepts lies in that meals were and are often used to solemnize covenant relationships. This reading encourages everyone to take advantage of the offer of the New and Everlasting Covenant (Isiah 55:3) while it is available.

It is in the context of forgiveness and mercy that our text says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts...my ways are above your ways."

Our fallen human tendency to want to strike back when hurt by another is transcended by God's logic. He is more merciful, more forgiving, than we are towards each other. This mirrors our recent Feast of the Exaultation of the Cross: the paradox of the cross is that God can turn human cruelty into divine mercy and forgiveness.

Second reading Paul describes his ministry as "fruitful labor" but, all Paul wants is Christ. To live is Christ, and to depart this life means to be with Christ. Paul just wants communion with Christ. That is a contrast with the Gospel parable where the workers don't want a relationship with the vineyard owner; they just want more pay.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard comes immediately after Peter's request to know what the reward for the Apostles will be. It can be interpreted as a warning against thinking of the kingdom of heaven in terms of a personal reward.

The vineyard is God's kingdom on earth, in our own age manifested as the Church. The workers in the vineyard are those the Lord calls to assist him in his labors: all Christians, clergy and laity are called to care for and cultivate the kingdom manifested as the Church.

The message of the parable is that all who are called to work with the Lord to care for his kingdom will receive the same reward. The early Church Fathers held that the "denarius" or the "usual wage" represents eternal life, the "basic pay" of all who heed the Master's call to come into his vineyard. This parable seems as odds with other passages (Lk 19:11 and 1 Cor 3:14-15) that suggests a distinction of greater and lesser reward in the next life. How can both be true?

St.Thomas Aquinas addresses this issue, and his answer is, that while God gives the same objective gift to each of the elect, eternal life, there is a diversity in the subjective enjoyment of that gift. Heaven is granted to everyone who is in Christ, but the more virtuous will derive greater enjoyment from it.

The grumbling workers may represent any who misconstrues the nature of the vineyard, the workers have a legalistic conception of their relationship with the Lord. They agreed on a certain reward for a certain amount of work. The workers called later to the vineyard are working on trust. They have no contract with the Lord, but are trusting that the Lord will give them what is just.

The first group fail to see that it is a privilege to work in the vineyard and take part in the labor of the Lord. Being in the vineyard means being close to the Lord. Their joy should increase that others, even through lately come, can share in the same joy. The first group are those who heed God's call, but don't understand God's self-giving nature and haven't

assimilated that nature within themselves. God's thoughts of mercy and grace and above their thoughts. If they understood the nature of the Lord of the vineyard, they would have been overjoyed that so many could share in the same reward they themselves received.

We can think of those who have been cradle Catholics and those who convert on their deathbed, all have had different work in the vineyard. Those who worked throughout their life and those who offered their final sufferings as a prayer for others.

Let's rejoice that we have a gracious God, overflowing in grace and mercy, and let's imitate his character in our lives. Let us also offer a prayer of thanksgiving that we are now in that vineyard helping to promote the kingdom of God.