

## TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 20, 2020 A

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Loving God, we gather together to share life and to seek your ways which are always beyond what we can understand. May your Holy Spirit breathe upon us as we reflect on the Word you place before us today. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Response to last week's Word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** In the first reading, we are told that “*God’s ways are not our ways.*” In the Gospel, we have a concrete example of this truth as we see how the latecomer to the vineyard is treated. In the second reading, Paul speaks of his desire to have Christ exalted in him.

*Let us listen to God’s Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

### FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:6-9

This reading, issued to the Israelite exiles in Babylon, is a call to worship, a call to conversion, and a call to believe in God’s ways. It begins with an exhortation to “*seek the Lord, while he may be found...and while he is still near.*” We can assume that the author does not literally believe that God is moving soon to a distant place where he cannot be found. God can always be found and he is *always* near, but our dulled hearts may not recognize his presence. Perhaps the writer is saying, “Seek God while you have some spiritual sense in you. Seek him before you lose all belief in him.”

The writer issues a call to the sinner to turn from his sinful ways. The reading concludes with a reference to God’s mysterious ways. In general, this verse is a reminder to us that we do not understand the ways of God in our lives or world. But in the context of today’s Gospel, where a latecomer receives the same wages as the one who has worked all day, the saying is probably a reference to God’s great mercy. Despite the fact that we may have been huge sinners and have spent most of our lives in a state of indifference to God, he will have mercy on us if we turn from our sinful ways. This way of acting is probably unlike how we would behave if we were God.

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 145

This is a psalm of praise to God for his mercy.

### SECOND READING: Philippians 1:20-24, 27

For this and the next three Sundays, the second reading is taken from St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians. This is an amazing reading. Paul is writing from prison and is not sure whether he will get out alive. But it does not matter because for him, “life is Christ and death is gain.” If he gets out of prison, that’s okay too; it will give him another opportunity to preach the Gospel. The bottom line for Paul is to serve Christ and his Gospel. He urges his readers to have the same attitude.

### PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 20:1-16

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

## GOSPEL: Matthew 20:1-16

This Gospel is perhaps one of the most puzzling and disliked parables in the Bible because of its *perceived* grave injustice. Some scholars say that the parable is told as a response to a question Peter raised on behalf of his fellow apostles: What reward would they receive for giving up everything to work in the Lord's vineyard?

In this parable, no one is lazy. The men are standing around only because no one has hired them. But once hired, they go to work and are paid the *agreed* wage at the end of the day. However, their sense of justice is upset when those hired later in the day receive the same amount. They object to the fact that the late workers are getting more than they should be paid. In truth, however, the landowner has not been unfair to the all-day workers, having paid them the *agreed* wage. Rather, he decides to be very *generous* to the latecomers; hence, the second to the last verse of today's Gospel: "*Are you envious because I am generous?*" Envy on the part of Jesus' followers is unwarranted since every gift of God completely comes from his generosity, and not from any individual's ability or activity. God's justice looks more like human mercy.

The parable has two other applications: one to Matthew's community living several decades after Christ, and to us living 2,000 years later.

In regards to Matthew's community made up of mostly Jewish Christians and some Gentile Christians, the farmer may have looked upon the Gentiles as the workers going out late in the day and receiving the same wages or in their same spiritual blessings as the Jews who have been faithful to God all their lives. In this case, the Jewish Christians may have erroneously believed that one *earned* salvation by good works. Salvation is a *gift* and not something we earn.

For us, the issue might be death-bed conversions like the good thief whom some, maybe many, believed 'stole heaven.' We do not earn heaven by good works but, rather, by opening our hearts to God's saving grace. Whether we have served him from sunrise to sunset or enlisted for service only at the eleventh hour, God blesses us with his bounty not because we have *earned* his goodness, but because of who he is, namely, a God of mercy and compassion.

## FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

*The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.*

2. How easy or hard is it for us to accept and embrace a God whose ways are sometimes not our ways?

3. Paul's attitude towards life and death is quite astounding. What might help us to get to a point where we too could say: "For me, death is gain"?

4. Do you ever struggle with the whole issue of fairness in life, e.g., bad or irreligious people doing well, and really good people experiencing a lot of pain and hardship?

5. How big or small is your God? Do you think that career criminals, dictators, or rapists who turn to God on their deathbed (e.g., the good thief) should be admitted to heaven?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

## RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Seek to enter into God's compassion for those who come late and do less.

**JOURNALING.** *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

## PRAYING WITH THE WORD

**Facilitator:** Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, your ways of seeing people turns our imagination upside down, for your ways are not our ways. When we are stuck in ways of thinking that do not reflect your values, open our eyes and help us to see as you.*

**CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING,  
PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

Lord, help us to look at others with the same kindness with which you look upon us, so that we may rejoice in the salvation of all people, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*The Weaver*

*My life is but a weaving  
between my Lord and me.  
I cannot choose the colors  
He worketh steadily.  
Oft time He weaveth sorrow  
and I in foolish pride  
forget He sees the upper,  
and I, the underside.  
Not 'til the loom is silent  
and the shuttles cease to fly,  
shall God unroll the canvas  
and explain the reason why.  
The dark threads are as needful  
in the Weaver's skillful hand  
as the threads of gold and silver  
in the pattern He has planned.*

*(Author Unknown)*