

Reading for the Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

20th September 2026

First reading

Isaiah 55:6-9

‘My thoughts are not your thoughts.’

Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 145(144):2-3. 8-9. 17-18. R18a

The Lord is close to all who call him.

I will bless you day after day, and praise your name for ever and ever.

The Lord is great and highly to be praised; his greatness cannot be measured.

The Lord is kind and full of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in mercy.

How good is the Lord to all, compassionate to all his creatures.

The Lord is just in all his ways, and holy in all his deeds.

The Lord is close to all who call him, who call on him in truth.

Second reading

Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

‘For to me to live is Christ.’

Brothers and Sisters: Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Gospel Acclamation

Cf. Acts 16:14b

Alleluia, alleluia.

Open our hearts, O Lord,

that we may pay attention to the words of your Son.

Alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 20:1-16

‘Do you begrudge my generosity?’

At that time: Jesus told his disciples this parable, “The kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market-place, and to them he said, “You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.” So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, “Why do you stand here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You go into the vineyard too.” ‘And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, “Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.” And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?” So the last will be first, and the first last.’

Short reflection on the reading for today

The core of the Gospel parable is also in the Isaiah passage: “My thoughts are not your thoughts.” Try as we may, it is impossible to justify the payment of the workers in the vineyard in ordinary social terms. It could hardly be said to be fair. Yes, the owner is generous to the last comers, but why is he not generous to the others as well? It is simply that there is no reckoning up deserts when man meets God.

In Our Lord’s time Judaism had reached a legalistic state, and the mentality was prevalent that salvation could and must be earned. There were many commands which must be fulfilled, and people were divided into two classes, the righteous who were on the road to salvation by fulfilling the commands, and the unrighteous, outcasts despised by those who kept the law. It was this slot-machine conception of God that Jesus opposed by his emphasis on love, for in love there is no calculation of duties, rights and obligations; there is only an open-handed giving without counting the cost, and a grateful receiving. We can never say that we have earned our salvation, or anything from God, but can only stand suppliant before him.

The latest workers in the vine-yard have not earned what the owner gives them, and the mistake of their envious colleagues is to think that they can deserve well of the owner.

Devout Christians may find it hard to stomach that someone who repents on his deathbed is admitted to the kingdom no less than those who have struggled and suffered all their lives for what is right. But this would presuppose a commercial attitude of reward and punishments from God, and it neglects the nature of love. The relationship of the believer to God must be personal love, and as such it is its own reward, for it brings its own happiness also in this life. The greater the struggle, the more a Christian turns to God and finds comfort in the security of his love. Also, fidelity through a long life does bring some advantage over a skimpy final conversion, for it may well be that the relationship of love has so deepened over the years that the Christian, faithfully following Christ, has more capacity for the full enjoyment of God’s company than one who comes to know God only at the last moment. Here it is not a matter of God giving a greater reward, but of the person being more capable of receiving it.

Of this deep and rewarding relationship with God and with Christ Paul shows himself in the second reading to be a shining example. Writing as he does under persecution he is yet filled with the joy of Christ. His life is already united with Christ’s life, and he longs for the fulfilment of final union.

The parable of the vineyard-workers is no blueprint for labour relations, but it illustrates very well Jesus’ teaching about grace and mercy. There are consequences to be drawn, and, in The Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis wrote: “The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.” (§114)

