

Reading for Weekday in Ordinary Time

19th August 2026

First reading

Ezekiel 34:1-11

‘I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.’

The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

‘Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

‘For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.’

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 23(22):1-3a. 3b-4. 5. 6. R1

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose.

Near restful waters he leads me; he revives my soul.

He guides me along the right path, for the sake of his name.

Though I should walk in the valley of the shadow of death, no evil would I fear, for you are with me.

Your crook and your staff will give me comfort.

You have prepared a table before me in the sight of my foes.

My head you have anointed with oil; my cup is overflowing.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

In the Lord's own house shall I dwell for length of days unending.

Gospel Acclamation

Hebrews 4:12

Alleluia, alleluia.

The word of God is living and active,

discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

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 story seems, as often happens in the Gospel, to reflect the situation of the early Church. The first Christians were all Jews. Before their conversion they had been trying to live according to the requirements of their Jewish faith. They belonged to a people who had thousands of years of religious history; they were God’s own people. Then, Gentiles began to be admitted into the community. Some of these people probably came from totally pagan environments. They may have lived very immoral lives and yet, once accepted and baptised, they enjoyed all the privileges of the community. Somehow, it did not seem right.

But this is the justice of God which we need to learn. Without exception, he gives his love—all of his love—to all those who open their hearts to it. It does not matter whether that happens early or late. One reason for that is because God’s love can never be earned, only accepted. And, as the previous story indicated, the genuine needs of all should be met. The fact that the latecomers were only employed at the last hour does not make their needs any less than those who came earlier. God’s justice is measured by our needs, not by mathematical divisions.

What each of the workers received was a symbol of the love of God, who is the vineyard owner. All—early arrivals and latecomers—got exactly the same, the love of their Master and Lord. There are not various degrees of that love. It is always 100 percent. God is Love; he cannot not love and he cannot not love totally. He cannot and will not give more of that love to one than another.

This is indeed something we should be grateful for. Because it can happen—perhaps it has already happened,—when we move far from God. But whatever time we turn back to him, even if it be the 11th hour, he is waiting with open arms. Thank heavens for the justice of God!