

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Someone can walk into a recovery meeting and seem to find in a few months what took us years to discover. Another person rebuilds a relationship we are still grieving or seems to move forward while we continue struggling. Nothing has actually been taken from us, yet comparison has a remarkable way of making our own gifts feel smaller.

Sunday's gospel exposes that temptation through the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16). A landowner goes out at different hours of the day and invites laborers to work. Some begin early in the morning. Others arrive much later. At the end of the day, each receives the same wage. Those who worked the longest are not cheated; they receive exactly what was promised. Their frustration begins when they compare what they received with what was given to someone else.

The landowner asks, “*Are you envious because I am generous?*” (Matthew 20:15). That question reaches into recovery. Comparison can make us forget what God has already done because we become preoccupied with how someone else's story is unfolding. We may wonder why another person found sobriety sooner, why their family seems to be healing faster, or why they appear to experience a spiritual freedom that still feels distant to us.

Underneath comparison is often the belief that grace should work like a scorecard. If we have worked harder or been faithful longer, part of us expects that God should reward us accordingly. The opposite can happen too. We may believe we arrived too late, failed too many times, or wasted too much of our lives to receive what others have found.

The first reading challenges both ways of thinking: “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord*” (Isaiah 55:8). We tend to calculate what seems fair. God continues going into the marketplace, looking for people who are still standing there and inviting them into His vineyard. His generosity toward someone else does not reduce what He has given us.

This does not mean effort is irrelevant. Every worker still has to enter the vineyard. Recovery requires action. We show up and work the Steps. We tell the truth, make amends where needed, and keep doing the next right thing. But these practices are responses to grace. They are not ways of putting God in our debt or proving that we deserve more than someone else.

Gratitude helps loosen comparison's grip. Instead of asking why another person received something we wanted, we can ask what God has placed in our hands today. Perhaps it is another day of sobriety or simply the willingness to begin again. Gratitude does not deny what we still long for. It keeps longing from becoming resentment.

There is also great hope in the workers who arrive late. No one needs to conclude that they have missed their chance. Some of us find recovery after decades of addiction. Others return after relapse or after years of trying to manage alone. The landowner keeps going out. God's invitation remains.

Saint Paul writes in the second reading, “*For to me life is Christ*” (Philippians 1:21). Recovery eventually leads us beyond measuring ourselves against one another. Our deepest question is not whether we are doing better

or worse than someone else, but whether our lives are becoming more rooted in Christ.

There is no shortage of mercy in God's vineyard. Whether we arrived early or late, the invitation is the same: receive what God is giving, do the work placed before us, and learn to rejoice when grace finds someone else too.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where has comparison been making you less grateful for the grace God is already giving you?
- Do you tend to believe that you have worked hard enough to deserve more, or that you have failed too much to receive what God wants to give?
- What would it look like this week to receive your own place in God's vineyard with gratitude and genuinely rejoice in another person's progress?

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Isaiah 55:6–9

RESP. PS. Psalm 145:2–3, 8–9, 17–18

SECOND READING Philippians 1:20c–24, 27a

GOSPEL Matthew 20:1–16a