

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time



This Sunday's Gospel Reading shares a story about the temptation to compare ourselves with others. Theodore Roosevelt once remarked that comparison is the thief of joy. In addition to the emotional cost, making these comparisons can prevent us from seeking the help we need and can potentially harden our hearts as we see God's abundant grace fill the lives of others.

Last week, we discussed the cost of resentment, which often comes as a result of comparison and expectations set upon God and others. Listen as Jesus describes the generosity of God and the dangers of a heart hardened by comparison as he tells a parable of hired laborers working in a vineyard:

*The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard.
After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.
Going out about nine o'clock, the landowner saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.'
So they went off.
And he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise.
Going out about five o'clock, the landowner found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?'
They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.'
He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.'*

This landowner is willing to go to great lengths to employ many. As we'll see, one's attitude can be compromised by the anxiety that others are rewarded the same for doing less work. Similarly in recovery, we can fall into the trap of envy—desiring what others have, which is often accompanied by feelings of discontent and resentment.

We must be careful not to impose expectations upon God. He is patient, loving, and merciful. As highlighted by this and other stories, God goes to great lengths to find us and reconcile us to Him:

Reflection Questions

*When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman,
'Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.'
When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage.
So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more,
but each of them also got the usual wage.
And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying,
'These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat.'
He said to one of them in reply,
'My friend, I am not cheating you.
Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go.
What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?'
Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."*

Often, the anxiety that comes with comparison is rooted in fear. Regardless of how petty, it may spur feelings of inadequacy or doubt. Many of us have lived by the principle that we can earn God's favor and, therefore, become the arbiter of justice for the world.

Our solution reveals itself when we trust God, clean house, and help others. Be careful of the selfish idea that we can be the victim of another person's fortune. Instead, believe that God seeks to unite us in one vineyard and reward us eternally as we seek to shift our will toward His, one day at a time.

- What experience do you have overcoming patterns of envy and comparison?
 - What actions, prayers, devotions, or spiritual tools you have relied upon to make progress toward contentment?
- How does service to God and others help overcome fear, doubt, selfishness, or other unhealthy attitudes?
- How are you applying the Steps to your life today?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

Second Reading: Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16a